



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

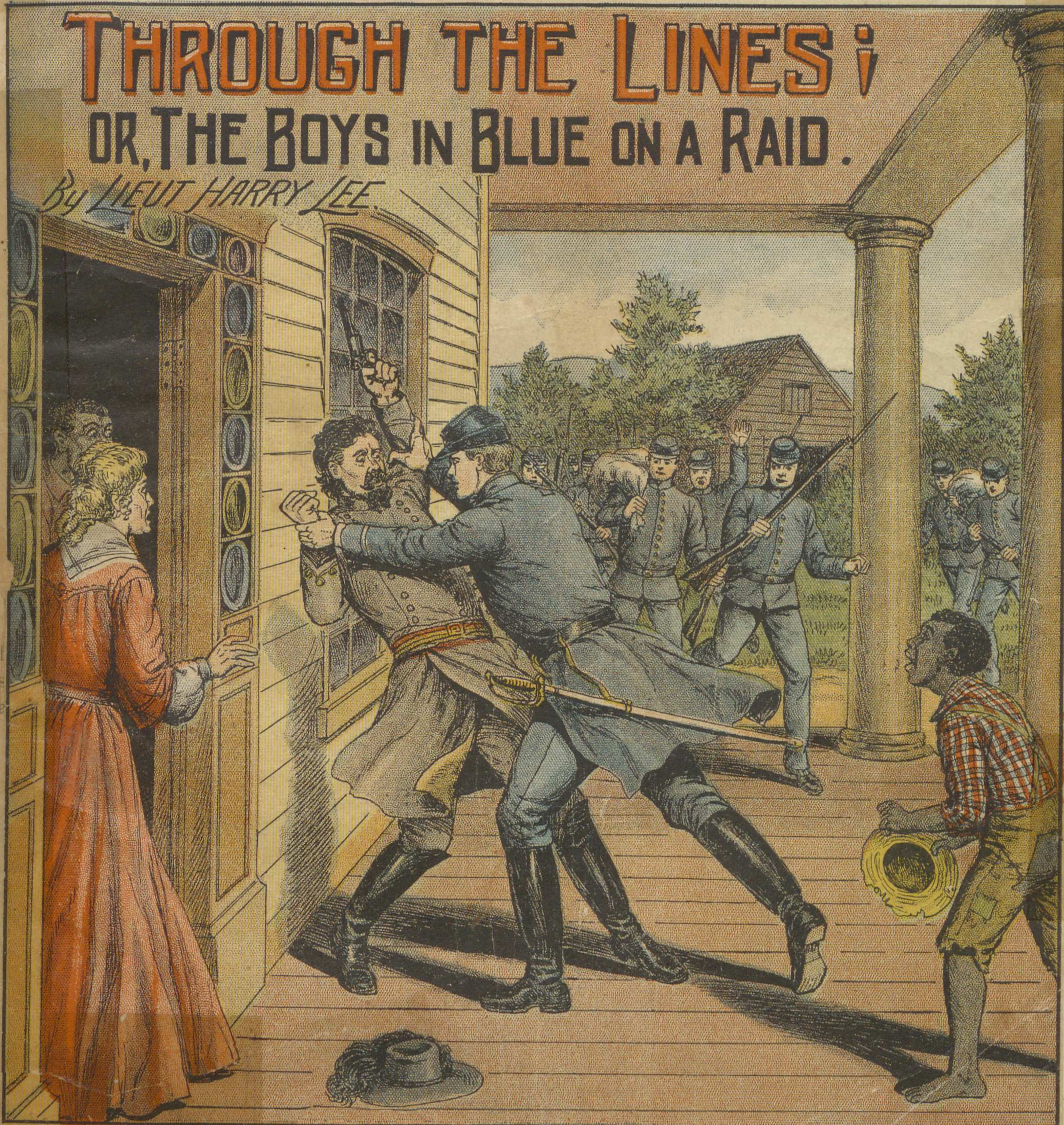
No. 5.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 9, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THROUGH THE LINES; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE ON A RAID.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE



"Here he am, Massa!" cried Pete, the negro boy. Colonel Stuart, the Confederate officer, had just drawn his pistol when Jack Clark cleared the porch at a bound and forced him back against the house.

AMERICAN DIME NOVEL EXCHANGE
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By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

STARTING ON THE RAID.

The Fairdale Blues, a brave young company of youths from a town called Fairdale, New York, had enlisted for service in the United States Army in the great Civil War, a contest which, for its magnitude and seriousness of purpose, has never been excelled in the world's history.

None of the members of the Blues were over nineteen years of age. At home they had been the best drilled militia company. Now that they were in actual service they were living up to their good record.

At Bull Run and at Hampton they had won honor and distinction. Even President Lincoln himself had sent them words of great praise.

Under fire the Boys in Blue, as they were generally called, had displayed the greatest of valor and steadiest nerve.

The great war was now well on. The sting of Bull Run had aroused the North like a sleeping lion.

On the other hand the Confederacy, confident of winning their rights, were massing mighty forces with which they hoped and expected to drive the Union soldiers back across the Potomac and establish forever the dividing line of Mason and Dixon.

McClellan had superseded the infirm and aged General Scott. The eyes of the world were upon this young and skillful general who at once proceeded to equip and organize a mighty army.

But with this organization ceased all operations of magnitude in the field. There were any number of small skirmishes, battles and raids through Virginia and along the Potomac.

The captain of the Fairdale Blues was a handsome and plucky youth who was known as Jack Clark, the son of Homer Clark, a representative citizen of Fairdale. His first lieutenant was Hal Martin; second lieutenant, Walter Gray, and first sergeant, Joe Ward. All these boys had been schoolmates and the tie between them was a strong one.

When the Boys in Blue marched away to the front they left many sad hearts behind them. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers bade them a tearful farewell.

But when news came of their remarkable bravery in the field, gladness and pride took the place of dread apprehension. Mr. and Mrs. Clark took a special trip to Washington to see their brave son.

Bessie Clark, the young captain's sister, and a very beautiful girl, had bravely left her home and a life of ease and entered the field as a nurse.

With tender grace she administered to the sick and wounded, and played the part of an angel of mercy.

The Fairdale Blues, after their achievement at Hampton, where they held the line against the powerful forces of General Magruder long enough for reinforcements to come from Fortress Monroe, had, by order of General Butler, marched north to a point on the Potomac known as Shady Glen. Here the Blues remained in camp for a time.

Then, one day, a surprising order came from Washington. When Jack Clark read it an exclamation of delight escaped him.

"Here we are, Hal Martin," he cried. "There is to be no more idleness for us. We are to have all the excitement we wish for the next week or so."

"How is that?" asked the young lieutenant.

"Read that!"

Headquarters, Army of the Potomac.

TO CAPTAIN JACK CLARK, FAIRDALE BLUES:

Reports are daily arriving of the depredations of Confederate troops in and about Brentsville and along Broad Run. You are the nearest detachment to that region and you are ordered to, if possible, march through the enemy's country at this point and raid the plantations. Do not apply the torch, but devastate the fields and secure all grain and supplies that you can find. Leave nothing upon which raiders or any detachment of the Southern Army could exist. In this move you may find it feasible to pass wholly through the enemy's lines, which are thin at that point. Report to me the result of your raid within ten days.

(Signed) GEO. B. McCLELLAN, General Commanding.

Hal and Jack looked at each other and then gripped hands.

"The boys will all be glad," cried Hal. "We are getting rusty for want of something to do."

And the boys were glad.

When Jack read the order to them there was a great cheer. Then preparations were at once begun for the expedition.

Raiding parties were common between the lines of the two armies.

There were constant collisions between small bodies of troops of the two armies and severe engagements were often the result.

The Boys in Blue equipped themselves for the raid. They were soon in light marching order.

Then they left Shady Glen and set out on their march into the interior. The further away they went from the Potomac the greater was the risk they incurred.

It was well known that large bodies of Confederate troops were encamped all about Brentsville. The Blues were really marching into the jaws of death.

It was possible that General McClellan did not fully realize the difficulty of the task he had assigned to the boys or he would not have issued the order which made possible the material of this story.

The country was beautiful on that autumn day when the Fairdale Blues marched out of Shady Glen.

The smart little company of Yankee lads, with their neat uniforms and shining arms, stepped away to the music of the fife and drum. While the lines of negro habitants followed them with cheering and songs.

It was an inspiring scene and many a veteran who had chance to read these lines doubtless can recall the like in those days in old Virginia.

Once out into the country the boys made ten miles before two o'clock in the afternoon.

They halted for dinner and a brief rest. In a few moments camp kettles were boiling with water from a nearby spring and the odor of savory meats rose upon the air.

For that morning the Blues had received a consignment of fresh beef from the Commissary Department and they took with them on the march. When it should become exhausted they were expected to live on the country or the fruits of their raid.

They passed thrifty plantations where corn and tobacco grew profusely. The harvest had been interrupted by the movements of the armies.

So, few of the farmers were at work. The negro slaves had mostly fled, impelled by the deceptive stories of the glorious results to accrue from freedom.

They were not yet in the region which General McClellan desired should be raided, so the boys were kept in bounds. But an incident occurred just then which promised immediate diversion.

Jack Clark was engaged in sipping a cup of coffee and masticating the savory meat of a 'possum stew, when suddenly distant firing was heard.

Hal came rushing in from the picket line which fortunately had been established.

"There is trouble coming, Captain," he cried. "Confederate cavalry are raiding the Trimble plantation two miles from here. Some of their outriders came down the road and fired on our pickets."

"Is that so?" cried Jack, eagerly, as he sprung up so suddenly as to overturn his coffee. "That is good news. We will give them some fun. We'll have a hand in that raid also."

It was known that Planter Trimble had a leaning toward the Northern principles and this was why the Confederates were making the raid.

"Do you know whose cavalry it is?" asked Jack, as he buckled on his belt.

"Colonel Jim Stuart's, I believe," replied Hal. "You have heard of him?"

"I should say I had!" agreed Jack. "He is the greatest of all the Southern raiders."

It did not take the Blues long to whip into line and start on the advance to Trimble's. Every musket was loaded and in readiness, and promised lively work.

Down the highway went the Blues.

Ahead could be seen a column of smoke, which showed that the Confederates were burning as well as raiding.

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"That is cowardly work," he said. "I fail to see what exigency demands such a thing as destroying homes without mercy. But we shall soon find out."

"I am not surprised at it," said Hal. "Stuart has the name of being cruel. It is said that Stonewall Jackson will not deal with him, or even recognize him."

"We will deal with him," said Jack, grimly. "And in such a way that he will be likely to remember."

As the boys went on a few scattering shots met them.

But Jack did not deploy his men until he was within half a mile of the burning plantation.

Then the Union soldiers came out from the woods into a lane behind the rail fence. Across the fields they saw the cavalry and the burning buildings.

Jack stood a moment and gazed upon the scene. He knew the cavalry must be three times the number of his own company.

But this did not deter him.

He had full confidence in his ability to whip them despite the odds. Hal Martin came up and asked:

"Shall we advance, Captain?"

"Yes!" replied Jack. "Forward all!"

With a cheer the Blues leaped the rail fence and charged for the burning buildings. A commotion was created when the cavalry saw them coming.

Stuart's men sprung to saddle and began to fire their carbines. In a few moments they came on at a gallop to ride down and cut the Blues to pieces.

But Jack spoke sharply to his boys:

"Hold your fire! Wait until they get nearer. Now, ready!"

The long column of mounted men in a semi-circle came sweeping down at a mad gallop. They presented an imposing spectacle which might have struck terror to the hearts of a company less hardened than the Blues.

Their shining sabres, their gray uniforms and the mad dashing bravery was splendid to look upon.

But Jack suddenly arose and cried:

"Attention, Blues! Ready! Fire!"

With a crash the muskets of the first line of Blues spoke. Then they fell back to reload, and the next line stepped forward.

Right into the charging ranks of the Confederate raiders went that storm of deadly bullets.

The effect was thrilling. Horses and riders went down in heaps. Others rode over them only to go down in their turn.

They came up to within a hundred yards of the Blues.

Then they began to melt under the withering fire and fall back. That was the end of the strife.

For the body of cavalry were raiders and not fighters. It was their custom to fight in Cossack fashion, strike and run away.

So the order to retreat was given and in a short while Stuart's raiders were beyond musket shot and riding away like the wind.

The Blues cheered wildly and now advanced to the scene of the raid. It was a hard spectacle.

Planter Trimble, with white set face, stood looking at the flames which were licking up rapidly all that he held valuable on earth.

That day's attack had made of him a poor man. He was only one of thousands of such unfortunate victims of the war.

Jack walked up to him and touched his cap.

"They have treated you harshly, sir," he said. "I wish we had happened along a little sooner."

"I wish you had," said the planter, in a hollow voice. "I am not a Yankee, but I have little sympathy with the South in its struggle now. I have desired to remain a neutral. This is what I get for trying to live peaceful and honest."

"I think you do wrong in holding the Confederacy responsible for the action of these raiders," said Jack. "It is a well known fact that Stuart is not countenanced by the leading generals of the South. He is a sort of guerrilla leader."

"Whatever he is," said the planter, bitterly, "he has done me a foul wrong, and I live now only to avenge it. My plantation is ruined, my buildings destroyed, my son shot down in cold blood and my slaves have fled. My wife is dying from shock and fright and I am left alone, friendless and penniless. Shall I seek revenge? Aye! so long as God spares my life!"

Planter Trimble bared his head and walked away. Jack could say no more. His sympathies were wholly with the stricken planter.

But he had no time to waste longer in the vicinity. He turned and gave orders for the Blues to march on. As they quickly fell into line, a surprising thing happened.

Out from a clump of shrubbery beside the highway there dashed a beautiful thoroughbred horse. It was ridden by a negro boy who reined the steed across the road in front of the advancing Blues.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEED OF A VILLAIN.

Jack Clark was surprised beyond expression. He gave orders to his boys to halt.

The expression of the negro boy's face and his excited manner told the boy captain that something was wrong.

"Oh, massa soger!" cried the boy. "I'se done come from Alexandria. Ole Marse Champneys he done send me up fo' to carry a letter to young Missy Esther, but when I gits dar she clean gone an' nobody knows whar. I jes' finks de Yankees got her, fo' suah. I'se only a po' little niggah boy an' I jes' don' know wha' to do!"

The boy's words ended in a wail. Jack was strangely interested.

He knew the life of these people on their plantations. He knew the trust they placed in their colored slaves and

he was aware that it was not at all a matter of wonder that "Marse Champneys" had sent the little colored boy to Alexandria to wait on his daughter and come home with her.

He also knew that there must be something wrong if the boy had failed to find his mistress.

In these uncertain days when the safety of the government was in doubt, and law and order were lax, it was, indeed, a matter of worryment that a young woman of the class he assumed this one to be, should disappear.

"Halt!" he commanded.

The Blues came to a halt and Jack approached the boy.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Pete!"

"Where do you belong?"

"I'se Marse Willard Champneys' boy an' I lives on White Rose Plantation, jes' about five miles f'om here. Everybody knows ole Marse Champneys."

"I don't happen to have that honor," said Jack. "He has a big plantation, eh?"

"Yes, sah! De bigges' around here!"

"Just so! He has a daughter who has been in Alexandria——"

"Yes, sah! Missy Esther done been visitin' her Aunt Clarinda up dere. De Yankees dey are gettin' so thick dat ole Marse tink she bettah come home. Mah wo'd, sah, I done fin' nuffin ob her. She clean gone, sah!"

"Ah! You think the Yankees may have got her, do you?"

"I jes' reckons dey hab, Massa!"

"Well, do you know that you are now talking with a Yankee, and that all my men here are Yankees?"

A scared expression came over the negro boy's face. He looked stealthily over Jack's head as if to find an avenue of escape.

"Clar to goodness. I didn't fink ob yo' not wearin' de gray uniforms," spluttered the little lad. "I don' mean no harm, sah! I'se glad de Yankees is comin'. I jes' guess I bettah go back to Marse Champneys——"

"Wait!" said Jack, sternly, "I'm not done with you yet!"

Pete's face was comical in its expression of terror. He trembled like an aspen.

"Tell me the truth now, Pete. You went up to Alexandria and couldn't find Miss Champneys?"

"Dat am a fac', sah!"

"You are now on your way home?"

"Yes, sah!"

"What do you think can have become of your young mistress? Can she not have gone home by some other route?"

"I don' believe it, sah! I jes' fink somefing hab happened to Missy Esther!"

Jack was thoughtful a moment. The case appealed to him. But he could see no way open in which to serve the young woman.

So he said, finally:

"Well, Pete, I'm sorry! We are going on and we'll stop at White Rose Plantation. If we can help your master, we will do so."

But the negro boy, who seemed to place sudden and instinctive confidence in Jack, began to plead:

"I jes' tell yo' somefin' mo', sah! I done fink dat ole Colonel Stuart hab somefin' to do wif it all. Ah knows dat ole Marse Stuart he try to get Missy Champneys to marry him. But she wouldn't do it and he mos' likely hab carried her away somewhere an' Marse Champneys, sah, it done kill him if anyfing happen to Missy Esther."

"I say, Jack," said Hal, with interest, "there may be something in this. I have heard that Colonel Stuart is a great scoundrel. If he has carried off the young woman we ought to look into it."

The possibility of such a piece of villainy appealed to the chivalrous spirit of both boys. Jack turned to the negro boy again.

"What are your reasons for believing that your young mistress has been carried away?" he asked.

The boy rolled his eyes and then, with a convulsive movement, drew a paper from his pocket.

"Ah kaint read nuffin," he said, "but Missy Clarinda she gib me dis letter fo' to take to Marse Champneys, sah. I done hear her read mos' ob it aloud to herse'f and I done know dat it hab suffin' to do wif Marse Stuart."

"Pete," said Jack, "I don't like the thought of reading other people's correspondence, but in this case it seems necessary. Let me see the letter."

The boy, who seemed to have overcome his fear of the "Yankees" handed the letter to Jack, who read it with interest.

"TO WILLARD CHAMPNEYS, AT WHITE ROSE PLANTATION:

"I send you this communication, dear brother, by your black boy, Pete, who has just arrived to escort Miss Esther home. This fact has given me a surprise as well as a shock, for Esther left here two days ago in answer to a letter purporting to come from you and asking her to come home instantly. She set out at once with no guard or escort and should have reached White Rose in a half day's journey. If she is not at this moment with you my fears seem an absolute certainty that something has befallen her. The dear old State of Virginia is in a dreadful state these days. It is evident that the letter was a decoy and I suspect that villain, Jim Stuart. He was much angered at her refusal of his hand, and in these lawless days he doubtless feels safe in any outrageous conduct. God forbid that harm has come to Esther. Let us pray that she has seen fit to stop at some neighbor's on the way and will be found safe and sound. I am a weak woman or I would at once start on her track. Let me know if she has arrived safely.

"With deep anxiety, your sister, CLARINDA."

All was as plain to Jack as a printed book. He saw the hand of the villain in it all.

The decoy letter, the trap and the abduction were all in sequence. Nothing could be more easy to understand.

He handed the letter to Hal, who read it. The young lieutenant's jaw stiffened.

"It is the scoundrelly work of Stuart," he said. "I wish we could break up his nice little plot, Jack!"

"We can do it!" said Jack, resolutely, "and we will do it, too. We are ordered into this region on a raid. Stuart is on the same mission for his army. We are foolish if we do not hunt him down. In that manner, perhaps, we can rescue Miss Champneys."

The negro boy, Pete, had listened with great intentness.

He now clapped his hands and grinned in a joyful fashion.

"Fo' de Lor'! I'se done glad I met yo', Massa! De Yankees am come fo' to sabe de brack chillun of de Lor'; but if yo' kin sabe Missy Esther, I don' keer wha' become ob dis no 'count niggah boy. Dat's all!"

This expression of absolute loyalty and regard on the part of the little negro touched his hearers. The boys in the ranks murmured an approval and Jack, advancing, placed the letter in his hand and said:

"Pete, you can ride on to White Rose Plantation and tell Mr. Champneys that we are bound to do our best to rescue his daughter from the villain, Stuart. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah! I'se done gone dis minut'. Ole Marse Champneys he tank yo' berry much."

The boy sprung onto the back of his horse, and with a leap the splendid animal galloped away. Boy and animal disappeared down the road.

Jack turned to the boys of his company and said:

"You have all heard this report of the villainy of the Confederate colonel. I propose that we combine our raiding with the attempt to rescue this young woman who has doubtless been abducted by him."

"Aye!" cried Corporal Tom Peters, vigorously. "Let us catch and hang the scoundrel!"

The boys swung their caps and cheered. Then the order was given to fall in and the march was resumed.

In due time the Blues came in sight of White Rose Plantation.

It was an estate of the grand old-fashioned kind. Wil-lard Champneys came of a long line of ancestors who had all been prominent in the early affairs of Virginia.

The Blues halted, and Jack and Hal walked up the box-boarded walk. The negro boy, Pete, was standing, hat in hand, by the steps of the porch, while the planter himself was pacing excitedly up and down.

He paused at sight of the two Union boy soldiers.

His face clouded a little and he called out testily:

"Come to raid my plantation, have you? Oh, yes, you know I am an adherent of the Southern cause. Take all I have got but give me back my daughter."

His voice broke and his eyes grew red. Jack bowed respectfully and said:

"Pardon me, sir. We shall hope to rescue your daughter for you, and can assure you of our profound sympathy."

The Southern planter looked at Jack and Hal a moment in surprise.

"You are Yankees?"

"Yes!"

"And you offer me aid? Don't you know I am a Confederate sympathizer?"

"That makes no difference," said Jack. "It is not a question of partisan sort. Common cause should be made against a man who proves himself such a villain as Stuart has."

The planter looked at Jack sharply.

"My boy, Pete, told me what you said," he declared.

"Are you sincere?"

"Quite so!"

"If you rescue my daughter—bring her back to me safe and sound, I'll swear by the Yankees forever. But you cannot do it. Do you know that you are in a dangerous country? That Beauregard has enlarged his army and that in some way you have actually marched through the lines?"

Jack was astonished. For a moment he felt a chill of apprehension.

"Through the Confederate lines?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that? We came upon no picket or outpost."

"Stuart is supposed to hold this part of the line, which extends northward to Leesburg. Our army is in force at Manassas, but the line is being extended far south of here." The old planter came nearer to Jack and spoke in an earnest way:

"I am an adherent of the Southern cause," he continued. "It would be my duty to betray you to our people. But I shall not do so. You have proved to me that you are a man of honor and high principle, even though you are a Yankee," he smiled. "This villain Stuart has done me a deadly wrong. Just now he has the best of me. But I will square the account with him—yes, if it takes all I have and costs me my life."

"Now I warn you that you are at this moment in deadly danger. At the risk of being adjudged a traitor and disloyal to our cause, I am going to befriend you, because I know you will aid me in overthrowing Stuart. I am one who has disapproved of this unholy war from the beginning."

"I respect you, sir, for that sentiment," cried Jack. "Rest assured the services of myself and my company shall be devoted to bringing the villain Stuart to a deeply merited fate."

"God bless you, sir!" said Champneys, in a choking voice. "You cannot know a father's feelings at this moment. She is all I have and in my declining years I cannot give her up."

"She shall be rescued if it is in our power."

Champneys' manner changed to one of fearful apprehension and he looked furtively about him.

"I must warn you," he said, "that you are in deadly danger. You have driven Stuart back through the lines. But scouts have carried the news and already a heavy body of infantry and cavalry are between you and the Potomac. You cannot get back. You are virtually prisoners."

Jack's eyes flashed.

"Never!" he cried. "We shall prove a thorn in the flesh

to the foe. My company is mobile. We are so drilled that by seizing horses from the stables about here I can mount my men and convert them into a company of mounted raiders. Then let them catch us if they can."

Colonel Champneys looked at the young captain with admiration.

"The hopefulness of youth," he exclaimed, "but you must not forget that you have thousands of daring souls against you."

"Nevertheless I do not fear," declared Jack. "We shall hold our own."

"At the present moment though you are in great peril," insisted Champneys. "You will admit that to be surrounded by a superior force might mean extermination."

"We must not be surrounded. We must move on," said Jack.

He turned to leave the porch, but Colonel Champneys grasped his arm.

"For mercy's sake! do not go!" he begged. "I cannot see you go to your doom. All I hold dear depends on you. Stay here."

"Stay here?" exclaimed Jack, in surprise and with a tinge of distrust.

"Yes, yes! I will provide for your safety. There is no one on this plantation now but Pete and myself. The slaves have all fled. I tell you it would be destruction for you to go on or to go from here in any direction."

"Do you mean that I should remain here and make a stand?"

"No, oh no! You would be overwhelmed. Step aside here and I will show you."

Champneys crossed the yard to bars in a rail fence. A lane extended between rows of trees to a swamp a mile away.

He pointed in that direction.

"See!" he said, "this will lead you to a swamp. It is an inaccessible place to one who does not know the paths. My boy Pete knows every hole and corner of that place. In the heart of that swamp is a small island. You can camp there, and be secure from the whole of Beauregard's army. Then you can come forth on a raid, or strike a blow and return to your hiding place and baffle all pursuit. Do you see?"

Jack's eyes flashed with delight.

"Capital!" he cried. "Nothing could be better. But—it is no trap?"

"Trap?" exclaimed Champneys, indignantly. "Do I look like a man who would lead you into a trap? My word, sir, is good!"

"But—you are a Southerner——"

"True! Ordinarily I would refuse to aid you. But I would not entrap you, for I abhor treachery. I am serving my own interests, for you are the only hope I have of beating Stuart and rescuing my daughter."

Jack clasped the planter's hand.

"I trust you, Colonel Champneys!" he cried, "and I give you my word that all possible shall be done to rescue your daughter."

The old man's lips trembled.

"I feel assured of that," he said, "but I warn you to waste no time. Go to your retreat in the swamp at once."

Just then a startling sound came to the ears of all from the distance down the highway. It was the beat of a drum and the shrill notes of a fife.

"I told you!" cried the planter. "Get away from here as quick as you can. General Foster's division is swinging down from the north to complete the right flank of the line. If you go to the top of the house I am certain you will see them coming. My house will be General Foster's headquarters! Do you understand? Do you want to be captured and sent to prison in Richmond?"

Jack Clark looked at Hal and both looked at the house-top.

The house was of the plantation type with double-decked piazza. The upper piazza roof just touched the coping.

The same thought was in the mind of each. It was a desire to verify the prediction of the planter.

It did not take Jack Clark long to make up his mind and to act.

Quick as a flash he sprung upon the porch railing and swung up the column to the floor above. He reached the upper piazza and then at once climbed to the next.

Only an agile athlete could have done this. Once on the upper piazza roof it was easy work for Jack to scale the roof to the ridge pole.

From this elevation he could see the country for a wide distance about.

Far away in the distance was Broad Run.

In the highway a mile distant he saw a long gray column. It extended as far as he could see.

He could estimate that there were thousands of men in that array. It was no doubt the long expected division of General Foster.

What caused the young Union captain a thrill was the fact that this division was between him and the Potomac.

It was quite plain that he was in a bad position.

What was more his presence in the vicinity was known, or soon would be known to the Confederate general.

That meant that he would be hunted down like a fox. He saw that he had struck good fortune in gaining the good graces of Colonel Champneys.

If he could be secure in the hiding place in the swamp he could see that he would be in an excellent position to cause the Confederates a great deal of trouble.

He could emerge at will and cut off small parties or destroy provision trains, or otherwise hamper the foe.

Jack stayed but a short while on the house-top.

He remained long enough to perceive that it would be quite foolish to think of cutting his way back to the Union lines.

He was through the Confederate lines. For the present he must remain there.

He descended to the ground. He saluted Colonel Champneys and said:

"Sir, we shall avail ourselves of your proposition to hide

in the swamp. If you will lead us thither we shall be pleased."

"Pete!" called Champneys. "Lead these gentlemen to Turtle Island. Remember, your are to keep mum. Say nothing about this."

"A'right, sah!" cried the little black boy as he turned a somersault.

"Shall we not see you occasionally?" asked Jack of Colonel Champneys.

"As often as it is safe," replied the planter. "I have been notified that General Foster will make this house his headquarters. I may take my leave and allow him free use of the place. I shall resume my search for my lost daughter."

"In our raids we shall attempt to round up Stuart," said Jack, "so keep in communication with us if you can."

"This will be my means of communication," said Champneys, indicating Pete. "He can be fully trusted."

Jack now turned and gave orders to his company:

"Attention! Forward, march!"

The Blues fell into line with machine-like precision. Pete, the negro boy, went ahead as guide.

In a short time they were traversing the lane and had entered the swamp. Here it was necessary to march in single file.

At times it was necessary to creep on hands and knees under foliage so dense that gloom almost like that at night was about them.

There were bridges over sloughs made of a single moss-grown log. At other times they waded to their ankles in spongy moss or forded a creek whose bottom was of the whitest sand instead of mud.

Misery Swamp, as it was called, was a locality usually shunned by the poor whites or the superstitious blacks.

The great gaunt cedars, with their whitened skeleton arms, the dark jungle, the hissing moccasin snakes, the weird atmosphere of the place was sufficient to give even the strongest minded a chill of aversion.

Only hunters attempted to penetrate it. The deer and bear and panther roamed its wilds. Ducks and geese and heron were undisturbed in its solitude.

But all through the swamp were curious morains or islands of gravel, some covering four or five acres in extent.

On these islands all was high and dry and comparatively free from miasma. One of these was Turtle Island.

This was to be the abiding place of the Blues. When they finally came to it and ascended to the dry gravelly plateau, they were one and all relieved.

All the way Pete had pointed out signs to guide them in their exit from the place. Strange to say the little negro declared it quite easy for horses to come into the place. The bed of the swamp, though in places deep in muck, was generally of a hard gravelly bottom.

"Ole Marse Hitchcock, he come in here on horseback cause he 'fraid of snaiks when he go huntin'," said Pete. "Don' yo' fear to do it neither."

It was now nightfall. Pete had so minutely pointed out

the signs of the trail to Turtle Island that Jack felt that he could easily go in and out in the darkness.

The Blues hastened to make camp.

Their shelter tents had been brought in safely and these they now pitched. They were glad to find a good spring of water on the island.

In a short while camp fires were roaring, for the autumn nights were chill, and soon they were indulging in a hot supper, for Colonel Champneys had sent down plenty of corn meal for cakes and three fat pigs.

Darkness shut down over Misery Swamp and the Boys in Blue felt safe, though they were in the enemy's lines.

But Jack Clark had no idea of resting or of inactivity, and at once proceeded to carry out a daring plan.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTURING THE SUPPLY TRAIN.

Jack Clark's plan was certainly a most daring one. He imparted it to Hal who, however, was dubious concerning it.

"Colonel Champneys says that General Foster is to make his headquarters at his house," said Jack. "I propose to don the disguise of a Confederate officer and make a visit to the general's headquarters."

"For what purpose?" asked Hal.

"Well, to ascertain how strong the enemy are, what their next move will be and if Stuart is with them, and other important facts."

"It is risky!"

"I will allow that. But it is possible."

"You are captain," said Hal. "What shall I do?"

"Remain here until I return. Make no move of any sort until you hear from me!"

"How will you pass the picket?" asked Hal. "You have no countersign."

"That is provided for. Colonel Champneys will meet me just outside the swamp. He will have the countersign and I will pass easily in my gray uniform."

This settled Hal's doubts.

"I can see that it is feasible in that way," he said, "but I wish I were going with you. I would be of service to you."

"I have no doubt," agreed Jack, "but two of us in disguise might lead to discovery and consequent failure."

"I can see the justice of that," agreed Hal, "so I will say no more."

Jack was soon ready. He had retained the uniform of a Confederate officer he had used after the battle of Bull Run.

This he now donned and once more adjuring Hal to remain inactive in the swamp until his return he set out on his mission.

Leaving Turtle Island he made his way with the aid of a lantern along the trail marked out by Pete.

It was not long before he had reached the edge of the swamp.

Here he closed the slide of his lantern and remained in utter darkness. It was not long before he heard a faint whistle.

He answered it and in a few moments was rewarded by the appearance of the planter from a nearby thicket.

"Well," asked Jack, "is everything favorable for our plan, Colonel?"

"I think so!" replied Champneys. "You are right on time."

"I am glad I did not keep you waiting. Have you heard from Stuart?"

"Yes!"

"Ah! What did you hear?"

"He is ten miles south of here engaged in raiding a small town called Brantley. They say he is leaving a trail of fire wherever he goes."

"Is there no way to head him off?"

"I believe so!" said Champneys, eagerly. "And that is the subject I want to discuss with you."

"Very good! What is the plan?"

"I think if you had horses you could strike out by another trail on the other side of the swamp and intercept Stuart just as he leaves Brantley. He will outnumber you, but I know what fighters your men are and I think you can trap him."

Jack listened to the plan eagerly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "That is capital. I will start at once! But the horses——"

"There is the rub," said Champneys. "With General Foster's division there are fifteen hundred cavalry. Now I know that new horses are due from Centerville to replace many of the old ones. They will come over the Warrenton road some time to-morrow. If you could muster twenty-five or thirty men you might waylay the party and secure such of the horses as you need. There will be no larger squad as guard for the horses than ten or twelve cavalymen."

Jack was thrilled with the plan.

"How can we reach the Warrenton road?" he asked.

"By the same trail you would use to head off Stuart in coming from Brantley. I will send Pete to guide you. You can get out of the swamp to the Warrenton road by daybreak. The horses will come along probably some time during the morning. Securing them you can then ride southward to head off Stuart."

"Will there be equipments with the horses?"

"That I cannot say."

"All right!" exclaimed Jack. "It will not take us long to find saddles and bridles somewhere. Perhaps we can overtake a supply train on the way. In any event my boys on a pinch can ride without saddles."

"I shall pray for your success," said Champneys. "You may think it strange that I should aid you against the interests of my people. But I am not in sympathy with this war, and I place my daughter before all else. I must save her!"

"Colonel Champneys, if we capture Stuart I will hang him if he does not produce her safe and sound."

The planter wrung the boy captain's hand. Then he said:

"But I will return for Pete and I will send him right down here to you."

"One moment!"

"Well?"

"We cannot start on this expedition before daybreak. Suppose I accompany you to your house. I would like to take a look at General Foster and his staff. You can see that I will be easily taken for a Confederate officer."

Champneys hesitated a moment.

"There will be some risk——"

"I will answer for that. You have the countersign and together we may pass the picket. Alone I could not do so."

The planter bowed in acquiescence.

"Very well," he said, "but I would advise you not to get into conversation with any of Foster's staff. There will be danger."

"Leave that to me," said Jack, confidently. "I think I can manage it all right."

"Very good! I will comply with your wishes."

Together they now walked up the lane. In a few moments they were halted by the usual gruff challenge:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends with the countersign!"

"Advance, friends!"

The musket of the sentry was pointed at their breasts. But Colonel Champneys said in an undertone:

"Southern hearts are true!"

The sentry lowered his musket and gave a salute:

"Pass in!" he said.

The two men passed the picket and strode on up the lane. The scene about the plantation house was a vastly changed one.

Along the highway and across the wide fields were pitched the white tents of Foster's division.

The yard was filled with headquarters tents and the piazza of the house was thronged by officers, while orderlies went hurrying hither and thither.

It was an enlivening scene and highly suggestive of war. Jack Clark gazed upon it with interest.

They were hardly noticed as they passed the headquarters tent. Jack's gray uniform was a complete disguise.

The young captain of the Blues kept his eyes open. Of course, after dark as it was, he could not get an extended view of the tented field.

But, from the number of officers and the general appearance of things, he was able to deduce that there were fully ten thousand men in and about the place. The line extended for a long distance southward.

Mr. Champneys kept with Jack and several times they were met by Confederate officers whom they saluted.

It was not until they had ventured onto the house piazza that anything worthy of note was overheard.

Then a knot of officers drew within earshot and Jack heard some remarks that interested him greatly.

"That's all right, Pearson! But they were strong enough to drive Stuart."

"Pshaw! From what I know of them," said a tall Georgian, "they are only a company of mere boys. Their captain is a son of Homer Clark, whom I used to know well in boyhood days."

"Some boys can carry a gun as well as a man. The fact remains that they drove Stuart. He could not stand before them."

"Who is this?" asked a little colonel with keen black eyes. "What is the name of this company or regiment of whom you speak?"

"They are a company of boys and call themselves the Fairdale Blues, and they come from New York State."

"Pshaw! I hope our people do not fear such a handful as that."

"Fear? Oh no! but they are somewhere within our lines. General Foster will to-morrow send out a regiment to capture them. It is said that they are very daring raiders."

"Catch them and hang every mother's son of them."

"It may not be so easy. They say this young captain is one of the cleverest tacticians in the business. If they start in, in the right way, they can bother us a good deal."

The short officer with the keen eyes only yawned and said:

"To-morrow night you'll see young Captain Clark in General Foster's net."

"I doubt it," said Jack, dryly.

In an instant the quartette of officers turned and stared at the speaker. His gray uniform saved him. It was the fact that he appeared to be an officer of inferior rank that led the little colonel to say:

"Subordinate officers will keep their opinions to themselves."

"Thanks!" said Jack, with a salute. "I was only expressing my opinion," and he walked away with Champneys.

The planter was trembling like one with an ague. His face was ghastly white.

"Why did you speak to them?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper. "What if they had desired to know who you are?"

"They would not do that," said Jack, with a laugh. "I have learned all I care to. So they think it will be easy to trap young Clark and the Blues, eh? Well, we will give them all the fun they want."

"I wish the war was over," groaned Champneys. "I don't like this false part I am playing."

"Cheer up, friend!" said Jack, lightly. "It may not be so bad."

"I thank you for your encouragement," said the planter, "but I can assure you my heart is heavy; I long for my darling, my lost Esther."

"If we don't rescue her we will have Stuart's neck in a noose, anyway."

Champneys' face hardened.

"Give me the privilege of drawing the rope," he said in a hard tone.

"You shall have it."

"What shall we do? I fear I shall have to leave you now. Have you learned all that you desire?"

"Quite all," replied Jack. "I will now go back to Turtle Island."

"And you will start for Warrenton Road before day-break?"

"Yes."

"I will send Pete with you. He will act as your guide."

"Very well, Mr. Champneys."

Jack now separated from the planter and started down the lane. He walked along leisurely.

It was not long before he heard pattering feet behind him and little Pete, the negro boy, was by his side.

"I'se heah, mistah soger," he said in an undertone. "Marse Champneys he done tole me to go wif yo'."

"All right, Pete," said Jack. "You are my right bower. You know the way from Turtle Island to the Warrenton Road?"

"Yas, sah! I does, sah!"

"Very good! You are to go with me to-night and show me the way."

"All right, sah!"

Jack, with Pete by his side, now walked past the picket, who saluted him. In a few moments they were in the swamp trail.

General Foster's army was within a mile of the camp of the Blues. But the Confederate officers did not know it, nor did they suspect that the swamp could possibly hold a foe.

In a few moments Jack was following Pete through the fastnesses of the swamp.

It was not long before they had returned to the camp on Turtle Island.

Most of the boys were already in dreamland. Hal Martin met his young captain with eager interest.

He noticed that Pete had returned with Jack and asked:

"Well, pard, what did you learn?"

"I learned much," replied Jack. "General Foster's division is here, about ten thousand strong."

"Yes! What else?"

"Stuart is raiding Brantley. It is up to us to cut him off when he leaves there and Champneys is eager that we should do so."

"Cut him off? How can it be done?"

"There is a trail known to our small guide here which leads to the Warrenton Road. It is safe to travel, for it will not bring us in touch with any of Foster's men."

"Go on!"

"I propose, however, that we shall secure horses first. Brantley means a ride of twenty miles before we can head Stuart off."

"Horses? Why, my dear boy, we have none. Can we secure them?"

"I believe so. Colonel Champneys has informed me that

a large drove of them are on the way from Centerville to recruit General Foster's cavalry. They will be along the Warrenton Road some time to-morrow forenoon. We will head them off, seize what we want, and ride on to Brantley."

"The deuce! Is it feasible?"

"Why not?"

"They may be accompanied by a guard too strong for us to handle."

"That is hardly likely. In any event we shall need horses, and horses we will have. That settles it."

"Good!" cried Hal. "At what time shall we break camp?"

"About four o'clock in the morning."

"I will have the long roll sounded at that time. Everything shall be put in readiness. In the meantime I advise you to get some sleep."

"You are right," agreed Jack. "That is good advice and I will accept it."

The boy captain crept into his dog tent and soon was sound asleep. The negro boy, Pete, had been given some rations, and was as wide-awake as could be. He refused to sleep.

It did not seem long to Jack before he was up again as the roll of the drum, which was lightly beaten, sounded. It was desired that the sound should not apprise the Confederates of their presence there.

Every boy of the company was quickly upon his feet. They fell into line, some with sleepy eyes, but all ready for business.

They were equipped for light marching and carried their muskets slung over their shoulders after the custom of cavalry.

Pete, the little negro, walked ahead through the swamp trail. It was a long and toilsome march to get out of the swamp on this side.

The light of day was breaking when they reached the Warrenton Road at last.

The Blues, at Jack's command, threw themselves down in the scrub undergrowth beside the highway to rest.

It was most welcome to them, for the march had been a quick and hard one. But as the minutes drifted into an hour they became much rested.

The sun was now mounting upward. The day was an ideal one for autumn.

Suddenly, Jack and Hal, who were keeping watch of the road, gave a start. Down the highway came a couple of horsemen.

As they drew nearer, Jack gave a start. They wore the Confederate gray. Some of the boys raised their muskets.

But Jack said sternly:

"Let no man fire on them!"

"How is that?" asked Hal, in surprise. "Are you not going to stop them?"

"No!"

"Why not? They are officers plainly enough, and may carry papers of value."

"That is hardly likely. We could do nothing with their

papers. We could not send them to General McClellan. If we stop them here they will give us lots of trouble. Let them go on."

Hal gave a start as he scrutinized the two riders. They were both youths of about their own ages. The young lieutenant's face changed.

"I think I can see another reason why," he said, "that young captain is an old schoolmate of yours."

"Yes!" agreed Jack. "He is Will Prentiss, who went to school with me at Fairdale. He left to join the Southern Army, for he is a Virginian and felt that he must be loyal."

"He is a handsome fellow. It would be a pity to shoot him, or to send him to a military prison."

"I shall not be the means of doing so, for it would avail nothing. He is like me, captain of a boy company called the Virginia Grays. His companion is Fred Randolph, his young lieutenant. Oh, Hal, is it not hard to think that we must meet as foes?"

"It is noble and generous of you, Jack, to let him pass."

"He would do the same by me."

"I think I understand. You are friends, of course, but I have heard that he has a very pretty sister named Nellie. If I have heard aright, though, she is much wanted in Washington as being one of the cleverest female spies ever known."

"Nellie Prentiss is a brave young woman," said Jack. "I have deep respect for her."

The young lieutenant's eyes showed a pleasant challenge. But he said nothing. The two young officers of the Virginia Grays rode by.

They never knew how near they had been to a concealed foe, nor why they had been spared capture.

After they had passed on out of sight Jack crept to the fence and looked down the road. He gave a start.

A great cloud of dust was visible and he saw the figures of men and horses.

"They are coming," he said, in a low tone, to Hal. "Instruct the boys."

Hal did this. In a few words he explained to them the purpose of the expedition to capture the horses.

The Blues were delighted and wanted to cheer, but Jack restrained them.

Nearer came the great convoy. Then Jack was able to see that there were wagons in a train behind them.

"There is a supply train with them," he cried. "We are in luck. This will be a blow to General Foster to destroy the supplies. He will credit us with being raiders of a decidedly ultra stamp."

"That is right!" cried Hal. "Suppose I send a score of our boys to a point further down the road to hold their rear and prevent a dash to escape?"

"A good idea!" agreed Jack, "take thirty men. Don't fall upon them until we have first halted them."

So Hal, with a part of the company, crept along the rail fence to a point a half mile below.

They hid themselves here in a cornfield. As the caval-

cade came on it was seen that it numbered fully three hundred horses.

Behind it was a train of a dozen wagons. There were not more than fifteen soldiers to guard this.

Hal let the cavalcade go by his position. Jack waited until they were very near. Then he shouted:

"Up, Blues, and at them!"

Over the rail fence swarmed the Blues. When the hostlers in charge of the horses saw the blue uniforms, they pulled up in terror. The small guard of Confederate soldiers tried to make a stand.

But after a brief fight they surrendered, corporal and all. Jack intended to hold them only until he had destroyed the train. He was not disposed to bother himself with prisoners.

Half of the horses had stampeded and were running wildly across the country. But each of the boys had secured one, and Jack ordered that a dozen be led for use in case of need.

The wagon train was deserted by the teamsters, who were much frightened. A quick examination of the supplies showed that they consisted of equipments for the cavalry, saddles, bridles and even sabres and boxes of pistols.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues possessed themselves of such of the stuff as they required to fit themselves out for the raid upon which they were going.

Saddles and bridles for the horses were secured. Also some of the sabres and pistols were passed around.

In fact, the little body of infantry was very quickly transformed into a company of cavalry. Some of the wagons contained supplies of grain.

As soon as the Blues had taken such equipments as they required, Jack ordered the wagons brought together and fired.

In a few moments a great column of smoke arose and thousands of dollars worth of supplies that were intended for General Foster's cavalry went up in smoke.

Then Jack released the prisoners and springing into the saddle, cried:

"Forward, Blues! Now to head Stuart off and hang him if we catch him."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the Blues, and away they dashed down the road. Jack and Hal rode in advance.

They rode on for five miles at full speed. Then they paused to breathe their horses.

It was now high noon.

"Let us rest here a while," said Hal, "the horses are not exactly fresh. We are safe from pursuit, and we shall go ahead with better courage."

"Very good!" agreed Jack. "Yonder is a plantation house. We will ride over there and see if we can buy something to eat."

For Jack quite forgot for the moment that they were raiding the enemy's country and that their orders were to devastate and destroy all possible source of supplies for the Confederates.

Turning, Jack saw Pete, the negro boy, gazing eagerly at him.

CHAPTER IV.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

"Dat am ole Marse Turnbull's plantation," he declared. "Marse Champneys ain' berry good friends wif him."

"Ah, is that so?" asked Jack, in surprise. "Is he a good man?"

The boy rolled his eyes.

"Huh! I done reckon not. He berry bad man. He shoot Major Bowe dead fo' jes' one lily word. He am berry great enemy ob de Yankees."

"That settles it!" cried Jack. "Has he got a fine plantation?"

The boy nodded.

"Heaps ob chickens an' pigs an' lots ob corn," he cried. "He de bigges' planter around yere!"

"That's enough!" cried Hal. "If we don't have some fat fowls for dinner we are fools. Eh, Jack?"

"I should say," agreed the young captain. "Call out a dozen men, Hal, and we'll go over there."

The order was given and a dozen of the Boys in Blue fell into line. Then, with Hal and Jack at their head, they started for Turnbull's plantation.

The other boys were loath to stay behind. But Jack knew that it would be more discreet to leave the main part of the company in camp.

Across the fields they went.

The blue uniforms ought to have attracted the attention of the residents there. But as they approached the house the only sign of life seen was a negro running like mad for the house.

Jack and his boys leaped the fence and ran into the grounds. The boys at once rushed for the chicken yard and were quickly engaged in capturing the choicest of fowls.

Jack and Hal went on up to the house. It was a grand old structure of the best pattern in the south, with wide colonial porch and fan windows above the doors.

The place seemed deserted. The door stood half ajar.

Pete, the negro boy, had kept at Jack's and Hal's heels.

"This is queer, Hal!" cried Jack. "The place seems deserted."

"Don't you believe it," said Hal, skeptically, "they're afraid to show their heads, that's all. Let's rap them up?"

Hal rapped loudly on the floor of the porch with the hilt of his sword. There was no reply.

"We'll go around to the back door," he said, and he vanished around the house. Jack stood a moment on the steps. Pete, who was behind him, was peering at the open door in a sharp manner.

Some of the Blues were coming across the yard with well filled bags. Just then a startling thing happened.

Out of the house suddenly, there stepped a Confederate officer. He had a cruel vindictive face and his eyes glared about him as if looking for an avenue of escape.

In the door behind him appeared a white haired woman

and a negro servant. The officer was no other than Stuart himself, the abductor of Esther Champneys.

Jack had not for an instant seen him, having turned his gaze. But a sharp cry roused him and he turned at sound of Pete's voice.

"Dere he am, Massa!" cried Pete, the negro boy.

Colonel Stuart, the Confederate officer, had just drawn his pistol, when Jack Clark cleared the porch at a bound and forced him back against the house.

"You inhuman scoundrel!" cried the boy captain. "Surrender! or I'll choke you as I would a mad dog!"

With a gurgling cry, Stuart tried to wrench himself free. But the boys dropped their bags and came rushing to the assistance of their young captain.

Then, though with an ill grace, the villain surrendered. In a twinkling he was bound and in charge of a guard of two soldiers.

From the house the white haired woman and the negro servant had rushed. The woman seemed distraught.

"Oh, my son! my son!" she screamed. "Don't harm him! He's my son!"

"Your son, madam?" said Jack, in the heat of his anger. "You have need then of deep compassion, for he is the worst villain in this country, North or South."

"I deny that allegation!" cried the woman, with spirit. "I know my son too well."

"Silence, mother!" said Stuart, sternly. "I am a prisoner of war. I shall soon be exchanged."

"Indeed!" said Jack, scathingly. "You are nothing of the sort. You are a raider and a guerrilla, if not a bushwhacker and you deserve hanging!"

Stuart's face turned ghastly.

"You won't hang me!" he said.

"I surely will, if you do not tell me where Esther Champneys is."

Stuart's eyes burned in a lurid way.

"Oh, I see!" he said, "that old idiot has led you onto that track. Why should I know anything about his daughter? Do you think I am a fool?"

"Far from it," admitted Jack. "You are a villain. Let us have the truth."

"I refuse to tell you!"

"Oh, you do? Place him on a horse, men, and tie him **strongly** when we get back to camp. We will see if we can **not** tame him. Where are your comrades, Stuart?"

"They are all about here, and they will overwhelm you **in a very short time**," said Stuart. "It is I who will be **making terms** then."

"Is Mr. Turnbull here?" he asked of the negro servant.

"No, sah! Mistah Turnbull am up at Manassas," said **the** darky. "Ah done heah him say he wouldn't be home **agin** fo' a week."

"Very good! Can you tell me if any of Colonel Stuart's **men** are about here?"

"I ain' gwine to say fo' suah. But I done reckon dey am **ten** miles below here at Brantley Springs. He done ride up here to see his mother!"

"Shut up, Scipio!" cried the prisoner, angrily. "I'll tan your skin for this!"

The old negro chuckled.

"I don' believe dat," he said. "De Yankees dey tan yo's fust. I done reckon I'se a free niggah now."

"That is what you are!" cried Jack. "Now tell me again if you know anything about a young woman whom this scoundrel has kidnapped and is holding a prisoner in some secret place?"

But the old negro shook his head.

"I dunno nuffin' 'bout anyfing ob dat kind," he said. "I kaint tell yo'."

A light of fiendish exultation shone in the eyes of the Confederate raider. He laughed in a scornful way.

"You didn't gain much, did you?" he jeered. "Old Champneys is barking up the wrong tree, let me tell you."

"That remains to be seen," said Jack, quietly. "Before we are through with you I feel sure you will be glad to tell anything you know. Fall in, men!"

At this, Mrs. Stuart, the raider's mother, rushed forward and threw herself at Jack's feet.

"Oh, spare him!" she begged. "Spare him for the sake of his old mother! He is my son—he is all I have!"

Jack felt a deep touch of sympathy for the old lady. He would gladly have yielded to her behest if it had been possible for him to do so.

But he knew that it could not be done. He removed his cap and said respectfully:

"Madam, this is a time of war. It is my duty to hold your son a prisoner. If, however, he gives up the young woman whom he has kidnapped to her sorrowing father, I shall give him the benefit of all possible clemency."

Mrs. Stuart turned to her son.

"Oh, James!" she cried, "is it true that you have done this thing? If so, I beg of you to undo it! For my sake!"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Stuart. "I am not afraid to meet my fate. I am a prisoner of war. I demand my rights. Come, why don't you march on, captain?"

Mrs. Stuart thus repelled, burst into a flood of tears. But Jack now gave the word and the boys fell into line and marched away. They had taken from the plantation such stuff as they required. But they did not pillage or burn the buildings as was the custom with most raiders.

When they got back to their camp a genuine sensation was created when it was known that Stuart was captured.

Corporal Tom Peters danced a jig and asked:

"What will be the next thing, Captain? We have made a record to-day. We have destroyed their supply train and captured one of their officers. What will be next?"

"We shall see," said Jack.

"I think we will have to keep a sharp lookout," said Hal, "they will be right onto us. No doubt Foster will send a large force out to capture us."

Jack was undecided what to do.

He could not induce Stuart to tell where Esther was. If they went on at the present time pursuit would certainly ensue.

If they should go back to the swamp they would be se-

cure and might venture forth on small raids until the time came for another big strike.

But while they were considering what to do, ensuing incidents decided the question for them.

It was now long past the noon hour. From the southwest there arose something which claimed the attention of all.

It was a mighty column of smoke which swelled every moment until it reached the zenith and hung like a yellow ball over the landscape.

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed Hal. "It looks as if the world was on fire down that way."

"I done tole yo' what it is!" cried Pete, the negro boy. "Dey have fired de town ob Brantley Springs."

"That can't be!" said Jack. "It is ten miles to the Springs and that fire certainly is not over two miles away."

Just then a shout went up.

The Boys in Blue all slipped cartridges into their muskets. Down the highway there came the clatter of horses' hoofs.

In an instant Jack was in the saddle. He knew what was coming, even before the cavalry of Foster swung into view.

He knew that he was no match for them for they were in force. All that could be done was to flee.

So he gave orders, sharp and clear.

"Forward, Blues! Gallop!"

The little company spurred their horses ahead and sped down the highway. There was but one direction in which they could ride.

This was toward the mighty volume of smoke. It might mean that the foe was behind that smoke. They knew that he was in the rear.

They could, therefore, only accept one chance as much the same as the other. If they were surrounded all seemed lost.

But Jack sat down hard in the saddle. He was determined to escape.

Their horses had profited by the rest. They answered gamely to the call made upon them.

The Confederate riders behind them had sighted them and were riding in fierce fashion to overtake them.

Around corners, through deep gulleys, up and down ascents and descents, in the highway they madly rode.

Jack, with gratification, believed that they were outstripping their pursuers. They seemed to be falling behind.

Faster and faster they rode. But nearer they drew to the smoke pall.

It certainly looked as Hal had declared, as if this part of the world was burning up.

CHAPTER V.

A BRILLIANT VICTORY.

Smoke hung over the fields and the woods and enveloped the rail fences. It seemed so heavy that, probably, owing to some atmospheric condition, it clung to the earth.

It rolled along the highway in fleecy yellow clouds. It leaped and enveloped the galloping party of Yankee boys.

In a few moments they were lost in the yellow fog. It was a strange phenomenon.

Yet, Jack recognized it as their salvation. He rode on for some ways until he came to cross roads. He took a road to the right, fancying it might make a detour and take them back to the swamp.

The foe could be faintly heard in their rear. But after leaving the cross-roads, all sounds of them died out.

Not until he felt satisfied that he had outwitted his pursuers did the young captain draw rein.

Then the Fairdale Blues pulled up their panting steeds under the branches of some oaks.

All the way Stuart, bound to his horse, had ridden in their midst. He had grown sullen and silent.

For a time the Blues rested their horses. Then Jack rode on more slowly. The young captain was satisfied that some great conflagration was to the south of them.

The forests were dry and perhaps it was a forest fire. No sound of artillery or musketry could bear out the assumption that it might be a battle.

Again Jack knew of no way that a Union army could have got to the south of Beauregard's line.

So he was disposed to attribute the smoke to Stuart's men burning Brantley, or to a huge fire in the woods.

On slowly and deeper into the smoke fog they rode.

Suddenly, Tom Peters, who was ahead, reined in his horse and yelled:

"Look out! An ambush!"

The roar of a gun smote upon the air. The flash of the flame caught Jack's eye. The ball went over the heads of all. But it was followed by the stinging fire of muskets.

In an instant Jack rose in the stirrups and flourished his sword.

"Forward, Blues! Charge! We will break their line or die in the attempt."

The boy captain felt convinced that it was but a small detachment of Confederates who had probably been sent by Foster to hold the road in the rear of the Blues.

It was more evidence of the fact that a death trap had been planned by the Confederate general and that he was determined to hem the little company of Union raiders in on all sides.

It looked as if he was rapidly becoming successful. Stuart's face assumed a jubilant expression.

Jack had seen this and as he urged the boys forward he shouted:

"Break their line, boys! At them!"

With a wild cheer the brave little company dashed forward at full speed. In their mad charge they were deployed in open formation, advancing, as it were, in a single line.

This was a measure of safety so that the fire of the foe could not be concentrated. So well drilled were the Blues that in an instant the evolution was performed.

The smoke favored them as much as it did the foe, who were, of course, unable to judge of their numbers.

The Blues saw nothing of the foe for some moments. But the galling fire told them that they were nearby.

Then they cleared a rise and beheld the Confederates in the dim haze.

It was a startling sight.

Just beyond was planted a battery of three guns which commanded the road. The gunners were supported by a body of infantry, about a full company in number.

Jack saw that the odds were against them. But he had his company in full charge and believed that he could carry the battery.

Boom! Boom! went the guns. The air was filled with flame and smoke. The thunder of the battery shook the earth.

The guns, however, had not yet the right elevation and the shells went over the charging blue line.

The infantry now opened fire, but the line of blue was now full upon the battery.

There was a wild ringing cheer. Pistols flashed, sabres swept the air and the blue line was beyond the guns.

The horses and caissons went thundering away into the yellow fog. So imposing an appearance did the Blues make that the line of Confederate infantry was demoralized and wavered.

"On, boys, on!" shouted Jack, above the roar of battle. Then the Blues went down in a mad charge on the line of gray.

The result was thrilling.

It seemed as if nothing could stand before the impetus of that shock. Some of the Blues went down, their horses piling up in a heap.

But the infantry broke and fled wildly. Then the bugle for recall sounded and the Blues as one man wheeled and rode back to the captured guns.

It was a wild, mad charge and a mighty victory. All was over in a flash of time and the guns were theirs.

Jack might have turned them upon the fleeing foe. But there was no ammunition, the horses having carried the caissons away.

The young captain of the Blues now showed his wisdom. He was not so foolish as to try to hold the position he had won.

The Blues were not fighting a battle. They were simply on a raid. There was no hope of reinforcements.

The game was that of strike and get away. Jack realized that he must put as great a distance as possible between him and the spot at once.

It was a great temptation to take the guns along.

But he knew that they could be of no possible use to him. On the other hand he must not leave them to the foe.

So he hit upon a plan which proved the wisest possible. He ordered the guns spiked and fires built under the carriages to destroy them, so that the guns could not be hauled away.

In a short while the carriages were crumbling to ashes and the supplies left by the defeated Confederates were also burned.

By this time the foe had rallied and from the sounds to

be heard in the distance Jack had good reason to believe that they had been reinforced and were coming back to the attack.

The young captain of the Blues now ordered his company to fall back.

Leaving the fires burning the Blues marched back to the highway and began their retreat. They marched on for miles until finally they once more got beyond the pall of smoke.

They took a road which led off at a tangent from the main highway. Jack now had no idea of the location of Misery Swamp, nor had Pete, the negro boy.

They simply knew that they were getting deeper into the enemy's country. As they went on they paused now and then to raid the plantation of some sympathizer with the Southern cause.

In this way the afternoon passed. All the while Stuart had been kept under guard a close prisoner.

He had been given no chance to escape. But all the while his face wore a confident expression and there was a sneering curve about his mouth.

Jack and Hal rode ahead and videttes were sent far ahead to reconnoiter as they rode on.

Nothing of the enemy was seen, however, and just as nightfall came, they reached a series of cross-roads in the centre of which was a tall oak tree.

At sight of the tree the negro boy, Pete, gave a great cry:

"Hi, hi! Massa soger, I knows whar we is now fo' suah!" he cried. "Dis am de road to Massa Champneys an' it ain't mo' nor five miles! I done reckon yo' bettah go careful now fo' yo' done suah run into de Confederates."

Jack and Hal had never heard more welcome news. They gave the order to double the reconnoitering force and the company went on with brighter hopes.

They were more than anxious to reach their place of security on Turtle Island.

There they might hide in safety until such time as they would feel safe to venture forth again. They had dealt General Foster's force several telling blows. They had effected much damage and could now afford to rest a while.

Little Pete, the negro boy, knew the way well now and said:

"Jes' when we gits a little funder along I kin take yo' cross de country to anodder road through de swamp. Den yo' needn't fear no mo'."

"You're a trump, Pete!" cried Hal. "We couldn't get along without you!"

"I'll take you to Washington next time I go and present you to the President," said Jack.

So delighted was the little fellow that he turned a somersault on his horse's back. He was assuredly a smart little fellow.

On rode the Blues now. They had covered two miles of the road to Champneys plantation when Pete gave a sharp cry.

"We'se jes' gwine to mek it fo' suah! Dere am de swamp road, and—golly fo' glory! Wha' am dat?"

Far down the highway came the sounds of firing.

The videttes were seen coming back at full speed. In the far distance were seen presently, riders in gray.

Jack knew there was no time to lose. He gave the word quickly and the Blues dashed into the swamp road.

Little Pete rode in advance and soon they were in the swamp. They saw no more of their pursuers.

Darkness was now rapidly falling. For an hour they threaded their way through the swamp under the tentative guidance of Pete.

At length they reached the camp on Turtle Island, and it is sufficient to say that they were extremely glad.

The day had been one of exciting incident and hard fighting. Five of their comrades had been left dead on the battlefield.

The boys hastily made campfires and turned in for the night, after partaking of their rations.

They found that the kind-hearted Champneys had left a couple of slaughtered pigs on the island and Jack found in his tent a brace of 'possums, ready dressed for the table.

Jack and Hal did not retire early for they had much to talk over and plan for the next day.

They were well pleased with the result of their day's work. They could now afford to lie back on their oars for a while.

Stuart was kept under close guard. There was need of this for the wily villain would certainly try to escape at the first opportunity.

"I say, Jack!" exclaimed Hal. "What will happen if Champneys puts in an appearance?"

"I was just thinking of that," said Jack, and then stopped short.

For just then into the circle of lights made by the camp-fire stepped the planter himself.

His face was pale and rigid.

CHAPTER VI.

STUART'S DEFIANCE.

Champneys was plainly under a deep spell of nervous excitement. He trembled like an aspen as he spoke.

"You have got him! I have heard all about it! Where is he?"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Champneys," said Jack, in a pacificatory tone. But the planter exclaimed fiercely:

"I cannot be put off. Where is he?"

Jack arose, as did Hal. For a moment they were in doubt what to do. Then the young captain reached a decision.

"Yes, Mr. Champneys, we have got Stuart."

"And my child—do not keep me in suspense."

"We have been unable to learn where she is as yet."

"He will not tell!"

"We are not sure that he knows."

"Sure?" roared the planter. "Don't we know that he is

the abductor? I demand that you turn him over to me. I have kept my contract, and you must keep yours."

Jack and Hal were bound to admit that this was literally true.

There seemed no honorable way out of the difficulty. But Jack faced the trembling planter and said:

"Mr. Champneys, be reasonable. If you yield to a hasty temper all will be lost. We must handle this subject with care. Only Stuart can disclose the fate of your daughter. If you should kill him now, there would be little chance of learning her fate."

"Let me see him!"

"Promise that you will offer him no harm."

The planter hesitated. Then he replied with an effort:

"I can see that you are right. I will promise you on one condition. If he admits that she is unharmed I will spare him."

"I accept your terms," said Jack. "I trust to your honor."

"I have never broken it."

Jack turned and called:

"Corporal Peters!"

"Aye, sir!"

The fat little corporal stood before him.

"I want you to bring the prisoner here at once. Take two guards!"

The corporal saluted and disappeared. Mr. Champneys paced silently up and down. He was trying to curb his excitement.

In a few minutes the corporal and guard appeared, leading the prisoner. Stuart was cool and defiant.

He faced Champneys without a tremor. There was a cold hard sneer about his lips. The planter was white to the lips and tense as a fiddle-string.

"You dark scoundrel!" he gritted. "What have you done with my child? Don't utter a lie or I will kill you!"

"Better cool your nerves a little," said the villain, contemptuously. "You're rattled! In answer to your question I will say that I do not know where your daughter is at this moment."

"Do you dare to deny that she was decoyed from Alexandria by a letter written by you?"

"I will not deny that."

The planter bowed.

"I have more respect for you now. Why did you do such a villainous thing?"

"I do not consider it villainous."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I love her! A man of my temper will seek any desperate end to gain the woman he loves."

There was silence for a moment.

"You coward!" said Champneys, tensely. "I will ask you again: Have you done her harm?"

"I will tell you the truth," said Stuart. "She is unharmed and in excellent hands. I hope that she will soon arrive at the conclusion that my love for her will assure her the greatest of happiness. She will deem it an honor and a joy to become the wife of James Stuart."

Champneys shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had proved yourself a man," he said, tensely. "If you had taken a manly way to woo her and proven yourself worthy of her, she would assuredly have been yours ere this."

"If I prove that now," cried Stuart, eagerly, "will you give your consent?"

"No, for I know you cannot do it. Your record is by far too black. Moreover, she will not marry you."

"Pshaw! A woman is coy! She needs mastery, that is all. You say my record is dark—it is not tainted with treachery. I am not a traitor! I do not shield the foe and secure a hiding place for them in a swamp. I am loyal to the Confederacy. How will you answer to your conduct?"

Champneys was stung to the quick.

"I would be more loyal to the cause if there were less men of your stamp in it," he said. "This is an unholy contest anyway. We are fighting our own kith and kin."

"If I escape, you shall have a chance to explain those sentiments to the Congress."

"You will not escape!" said Champneys, in a meaning tone. "Your only hope is to deliver Esther up to me safe and sound."

Stuart laughed in a scornful way. At this Champneys started forward as if to do the villain harm.

But Jack put up his hand. The planter stepped back.

"To-morrow!" he said. "I will give you until to-morrow. If you do not agree to restore Esther to me at once, I shall claim the right to settle with you in the most severe manner. It shall be my hand to pull the halter about your scoundrelly neck."

Trembling with rage and suppressed excitement, the planter turned away. Jack turned to Peters.

"Take the prisoner back!" he said. "See that you guard him well."

Stuart, cool and defiant as ever, was marched away. Jack and Hal walked out to the island end to overtake Champneys.

But the planter was gone.

They returned after a while, and Hal, with a yawn, cried:

"I am going to turn in, Jack! I was never so tired in my life."

"Good! I shall do the same very soon."

Hal took his leave. But Jack, with the care of the hour upon his mind walked about the island and accosted each picket.

Somehow a heavy foreboding was upon him.

He was not over-cheerful with the situation. They were deep in the heart of a dismal swamp which was surrounded by a large army of Confederates.

At any moment General Foster might take it into his head to bring up his artillery and shell the swamp.

In that case they would suffer greatly. Their supplies were limited and it would not be a difficult matter to be forced out by starvation.

So long as their presence in the place was unsuspected they were safe.

But already Jack feared that word had reached Foster of their presence there. They had been seen to enter the swamp by the cavalry which had pursued them.

Deep apprehension was upon the young captain's mind.

Thus far their raid had been a brilliant exploit. Much had been done. The foe had suffered severely.

But it looked as if the very brilliance of the thing was to prove their undoing. The enemy would be alive to the importance of their capture and the end would be sudden.

To Jack it seemed a long way back to the Potomac and the Union lines.

He realized how futile it would be to try and break a way through the enemy's line to get back there.

Individually or with one or two of his comrades he did not doubt his ability to do this.

But to take the entire company through was seemingly a sheer impossibility. However, Jack had no thought as yet of defeat.

After a while he went back to his tent. A far off in the Confederate camp he heard taps being sounded. Then he threw himself down and slept as a soldier can.

When Jack awoke the sun was streaming in at the entrance to his dog tent. He crawled out and rolling up his blanket walked down to the little creek and bathed.

Returning he put on his uniform and then Pete appeared with his breakfast nicely cooked by the company cook. Hoe cakes and 'possum with guavas and other fruits made a repast fit for a king.

The young captain felt much refreshed and when Hal Martin appeared, he cried:

"Good morning, lieutenant! I hope you feel as well as I do this morning."

"I feel much restored, Captain. What is the order for to-day?"

"Lie low and play 'possum!"

"That is a hard order to line up to. Idleness is always irksome."

"Very true! but this is a matter which involves our personal safety."

"I realize that."

"If General Foster gets an inkling that we are here, it is all up with us."

"He will shell us out."

"Yes."

"At that, we could simply move out of range of his shells," said Hal. "I understand this swamp extends many miles."

"But it is almost impossible. However, that would be our only loop-hole."

"Well," said Hal, after a period of reflection, "of course we know it is wise for the company to remain here. But for my part I would like to do a little scouting."

"There may be an opportunity," said Jack. "I have myself some interest that way. I would like, if possible, to visit Foster's camp again and get an idea of what is going on."

"Pete visited it last night and brought back an interesting report."

"What was that?"

"It was to the effect that Union campfires had been seen near the line of the Trimble plantation. That would mean that General McClellan has ordered an advance of some division of the army into Virginia."

Jack gave an eager cry.

"Do you think that could be possible?" he asked. "Oh, that would be the best of news. We would be saved."

"I think it is more than possible," declared Hal. "You know that I believe General McClellan sent us on this raid to sort of prepare the way."

This was a new idea to Jack and it pleased him greatly. He felt deeply encouraged. He sent for Pete and questioned him closely.

The information he gained from the colored lad satisfied him that an advance was surely being made by McClellan.

But another matter now claimed Jack's attention.

He felt that something must be done to rescue Esther Champneys. He tried to think of some way to force Stuart to tell where she was to be found.

Jack now visited the prisoner and at once questioned him.

"It's no use, Stuart! You might as well give that girl up. You cannot possibly compel her to marry you!"

"When I begin an undertaking I never give it up," said Stuart.

"You will not listen to reason?"

"My mind is made up. I demand the privileges of a prisoner of war. I demand to be sent to the Federal Military Camp for prisoners."

"It is my prerogative to keep you here," said Jack. "I will give you two minutes in which to come to my terms. If you still refuse I will hang you up by the heels."

Stuart, however, would not yield. As for his threat, Jack, of course, did not carry it out.

But just then Corporal Peters appeared.

"A man has been brought in from the picket line who says he must see you at once."

CHAPTER VII.

ON A DANGEROUS MISSION.

Jack gave a start of surprise. Who could his visitor be?

He accompanied Peters at once and in a few moments stood face to face with a tall, gaunt man, whose eyes were restless and deep-set.

"Jeff Trimble!" cried Jack. "What has brought you here?"

"I saw you riding into the swamp last night," he said. "I waited until to-day and then came in to see you! I saw that you had Stuart with you."

"Yes!" replied Jack. "I have caught the Confederate raider!"

"You did a good job. When he burned my plantation

house and ruined me, he made an enemy for the Confederacy. I have been on his track ever since. Don't Willard Champneys have a plantation near here?"

"Yes."

"I have come partly to bring word to him that I have seen his daughter."

"His daughter?" cried Jack. "Do you mean that? Where did you see her?"

"I saw her in the care of Black Eliza at Brantley. I tried to get word with her, but both were surrounded by Stuart's men."

This was important information.

"Who is Black Eliza?"

"She is an old colored woman who has been in the Stuart family for generations. She is as loyal to the raider as can be, and would do anything he ordered. Her principles are not of the best."

"You say you saw Miss Esther in the hands of the raiders at Brantley?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"Yesterday at four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Stuart was in our hands at that time. Do you know where they were taking her?"

"No, but I have no doubt she is still held by his men, awaiting his return. They are now in camp near Brierly, six miles from here."

Jack gave a start.

"So near as that?" he exclaimed. "It will then be possible to give them a surprise."

"No!" said Trimble, sharply. "You would get into a trap. Foster's men are everywhere."

Jack saw that this was true.

The best plan and one which he afterward adopted, was to take a companion and endeavor to steal into Stuart's camp and rescue the young girl.

The possibility of the enterprise gave Jack a thrill. He looked at Trimble and asked:

"What move would you advise?"

"Remain right here for a time," said the planter. "Foster is exceedingly anxious to capture you for you have been a thorn in his side."

"Well, I don't intend to fall into his clutches if I can help it," said Jack. "But I am anxious to bother him all I can. I am more anxious, however, to effect the rescue of this young girl prisoner."

"I see!" said Trimble. "For Champneys' sake I hope you will. Then I hope you will hang Stuart."

"I think he deserves it. But I shall be compelled to take him to Washington."

"President Lincoln will order him hanged, I know," said Trimble. "He has done more harm to the Union cause than you can know."

"I have no doubt he will be tried and justly dealt with," said Jack, "but if he has harmed Esther Champneys I am powerless, for I have promised Mr. Champneys to turn the villain over to him."

"Good!" cried Trimble, with pleasure. "I can see that you are a square young man. You shall have your reward."

"Where are you going now?" asked Jack. "What can I do for you?"

"Really, I could ask no greater favor than to interview Stuart. I have some things I would like to say to him."

"You shall have your wish on one condition."

"What?"

"That you will offer him no violence."

"You have my word. I do not wish to do him harm. I would only like the pleasure of telling him what I think of him."

"Corporal Peters," said Jack, "take Mr. Trimble to the tent where Stuart is under guard. Mr. Trimble, while you are in our camp I trust you will consider yourself an honored guest. All the privileges of the camp are yours."

"I thank you!" replied the proud-spirited Southerner, warmly. "I am conscious of being deeply honored."

Jack now sent for Hal Martin, who at once responded.

The young captain proceeded to have an earnest talk with his young lieutenant.

"I know that it will not do to leave Turtle Island at present," he said. "We are sought by Foster's men everywhere. We must lie low for a time."

"But I believe that a move of some sort should be made to rescue Esther Champneys. Now if she is at Brierly, which is only six miles from here, we ought to be able to do something."

"You are obscure," said Hal. "Why may we not leave Turtle Island?"

"I refer to the company. You and I might do the trick by a little clever masquerading, I believe."

"Just let me know how!"

"Well, I have a plan. It might work and it might fail. If it works, we win hands down. If it fails, we lose our lives. That is all!"

"That is a soldier's chance," said Hal. "I am ready to accept it."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"Very good! It shall be tried."

"What is the plan?"

"Just this! We have Confederate uniforms. We know that Stuart's lieutenant is Lawton Cross. We will write a message to him purporting to be from Stuart. We will induce them to give the captive girl into our hands to be taken to some other point presumably designated by Stuart. The old woman, Black Eliza, we will also allow to accompany the prisoner."

Hal listened to this plan with eager, wide-open eyes.

For a moment he weighed it carefully. He saw its possibilities, he considered the risks and finally exclaimed:

"Jack, it will work!"

"You think so, do you?"

"I know it!"

"Of course there is great risk."

"That is all right. Nothing ventured, nothing won."

If we are captured we may be hanged. But I don't believe we will fail."

The two young Union officers discussed the plan to still greater length. The result was that they called in Walter Gray, the second lieutenant.

"Walter," said Jack. "I am going to leave you in command here until my return. Hal and I are going away for a short trip."

"All right, Captain," said the young lieutenant, "I will do my best!"

"I feel sure of that. Now keep your eye on the prisoner, Stuart."

"All right, sir!"

It did not take Jack and Hal long to get ready. They brought out their Confederate uniforms and donned them. Once again they were going forth upon an individual mission more perilous than any they had ever yet attempted.

They were going right into the camp of the enemy. They were going to play a part more difficult than that ever played by the ordinary spy.

"Call out the guard and escort us beyond the picket line," said Jack to Corporal Peters. Then they made the start.

At first the picket thought they were Confederate prisoners and he opened his eyes wide as he saw that they were no other than his own company officers.

They had selected good horses and felt that if necessary they could give pursuers a good hard race. Bidding their comrades farewell, Jack and Hal rode away into the swamp.

Little Pete, the colored boy, wanted to go with them.

But Jack refused. Soon they were threading their way out of the swamp.

It took them two hours of hard riding to get out of the swamp. But finally they emerged at the point where Trimble had seen them enter.

From this point it was only four miles to Brierly. This was a little hamlet which had been selected as cavalry headquarters by General Foster.

Leaving the swamp, Jack and Hal rode boldly out onto the highway. From the very start difficulties beset them.

Their uniforms were those of a Georgia regiment. As it happened this regiment had been mustered out, after Balls Bluff.

But they did not believe that Stuart's men would know this.

Again they had no countersign. They could only depend upon the forged message from Stuart to get in through the lines.

Any close inquiry, any matter of doubt, any investigation might betray them. All these things were to be considered. Jack and Hal had weighed them well.

But it did not frighten them. Nor did they propose to turn back. The very daring of the plan was its greatest charm.

Along the highway they boldly rode.

They had advanced a mile toward Brierly, when there was a sudden sharp call from the bushes beside the road, and into the highway sprang a score of soldiers in gray.

Their officer wore the uniform of a second lieutenant. He was a dark featured man with an imperious manner.

"Halt! Where is your countersign? What is your business this way?"

Jack saw at once that he was an officious sort of a chap and one who would be likely to cause much trouble. But the boy captain was ready with his quick wit.

"We are members of Stuart's cavalry," he replied, with a pompous air. "Let us pass! We have important despatches!"

"I must see your despatches," said the officious lieutenant.

Jack reined his horse about and fixed a withering gaze upon the fellow.

"What? You?" he said, in a scathing tone. "Do you think I answer to an officer of your grade, or that I will be held up by you? Take care, sir, or I'll report you to General Foster, and everybody knows that he is a man not to be trifled with."

"I am here by General Foster's orders," snapped the lieutenant. "Let me see your credentials or you cannot pass!"

The Confederate soldiers lowered their bayonets and barred the roadway. Jack drew his sword, as did Hal.

"Stand out of the way and let us pass," commanded Jack. "I'll cut down every man in my way, and you fire on me at your peril."

Such strenuous objection caused the lieutenant to waver.

"I shall allow you to pass," he said, "if you will show me credentials."

Jack drew his papers from his breast pocket and flourished them.

"There they are," he cried. "You have seen them and satisfied your desire. Now get out of the road."

The officious little lieutenant was evidently satisfied that he had gained his point. This was all he really had in view, for the uniforms worn by Jack and Hal should have been enough to prove their character.

The two disguised Federals rode away down the road in triumph. When a bend in the highway shut them out of sight and hearing they burst into laughter.

"Well, we bluffed them all right, Jack," cried Hal. "I wonder what the next racket will be?"

The question was answered the next moment in a startling manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

Far down the highway the two young officers saw moving figures. This time they recognized them as mounted men.

Their uniforms were gray, of course. As Jack saw them he gave a start.

"Confederate cavalry," he said. "We're in for it now, Hal."

"Cavalry!" he exclaimed. "Yes, a squad of it, but do

you see those men with shoulder straps and gold lace? They are more than cavalry officers. I tell you—on my word, Jack, I believe it is a general and his staff."

"A general!" exclaimed Jack. "You are right, Hal. Here is a mixup for us. We are lost, for it is General Foster and his staff."

For a moment the boys were aghast. They felt actually weak-kneed.

It seemed as if all their plans were bound to tumble. Jack felt like leaping his horse over the rail fence and cutting out across country.

Of course this would have been the most fatal sort of a move. Neither could they turn back with safety.

"Whew! We are in for it, Jack!" gasped Hal. "We are done for!"

The two young Union officers seemed to think that they must surely be halted and questioned by the general and his staff.

But they were never guilty of a greater mistake. The Confederate general rode in advance, on a handsome white horse.

The two boys turned their horses out into the ditch. They saluted and General Foster returned it. But he did not check the gallop of his horse.

And so the whole cavalcade swept by. The boys saw now how groundless their fears were.

The general and his officers had seen in them only a couple of mounted Confederates. They had no thought that they might be spies, or foes.

Hal drew a deep breath and spurred his horse into the highway again.

"We pulled out of that all right," he cried. "I am beginning to think that we are going to succeed, Jack."

"Of course we are!" said the young captain. "We started out for that purpose!"

"But what on earth is Foster and his staff doing down this way?"

"Doubtless he has been down to his cavalry headquarters on a tour of inspection."

"Of course! Hello! Is not that Brierly?"

The spire of a church and the roofs of houses showed that they were approaching a town. In a short while the highway led down into the little village street.

To the surprise of Jack and Hal they were not hailed by any picket. This was explained in the fact that Brierly was completely environed by the Confederate Army, and picket guards were not necessary.

The little hamlet was alive with mounted men. The cavalry squads and troopers were in evidence everywhere.

Jack and Hal went on down the street unquestioned. They attracted no attention whatever. They rode on until Jack saw the guidon of Stuart's troop.

He reined his horse in and dismounting, accosted the guard:

"I want to see Lieutenant Cross. I have orders from Colonel Stuart."

The guard gave a great start.

"From ther Cunnel, eh?" he exclaimed. "So he is on

earth, eh? We were mighty afeard for him. I'll call the guard!"

In a few moments the guard responded and Jack and Hal were escorted to the tent of the Confederate cavalry lieutenant. He was a short stout man with flowing beard.

"I am glad to see you, gentlemen," he said, warmly. "So you have orders for me from Colonel Stuart?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"Oh, then he is yet alive. We had feared the worst for him. Where is he at present?"

"At a plantation near General Foster's headquarters," replied Jack.

"Ah! is he in good health?"

"The best of health at present."

"I am glad to hear that. What are his orders for me?"

Jack drew the forged message from his pocket. He handed it to Lieutenant Cross. It was a critical moment for the two young officers.

They had imitated Stuart's hand as far as they were able. At first they had feared that the lieutenant would notice this.

But deep relief came to both when Cross turned and said:

"Colonel Stuart authorizes me to turn over to you the young woman prisoner!"

Jack bowed and replied:

"He does!"

"Well, I am sorry to say that it is not possible for me to do so."

The reply startled the two young officers. But Jack held his nerve.

"Shall I report that to Colonel Stuart?" he asked.

"I am compelled to send him that report. The young woman is no longer in our hands. She has escaped!"

"Escaped?" exclaimed both boys. Then they checked their momentary sense of delight. Jack feigned a frown.

"I fear Colonel Stuart will be very angry."

"Well, he will have to be angry for all I can see," said the lieutenant, curtly. "We have followed his orders as far as we could. He should have been here to attend to his own affairs."

"I will so report to him."

"No," said Cross, quickly. "Report to him that we have done all possible to keep hold of the girl, but that a young woman who is known as a female spy for the Confederacy, came to us and demanded that we deliver her up. As she carried orders signed by the President of the Confederacy, I had no alternative but to oblige. Even had Stuart been here, he could not have refused to obey, unless by so doing he made an outlaw of himself."

Jack and Hal were astonished by this revelation.

The young captain had great difficulty in controlling himself and playing his part. It was a thrilling bit of news to both.

"This is most astonishing," said Jack, feigning great dignity. "I can hardly understand it. You say this young woman is a spy for the Confederacy?"

"Yes!"

"What name did she give?"

"She is Miss Nellie Prentiss, daughter of Colonel Jeff Prentiss of Beauregard's staff, and sister of Captain Will Prentiss of the Virginia Grays."

Jack's heart gave a wild leap. It was all plain to him now.

Before the war, back in old Fairdale, he and Will Prentiss had been bosom friends.

The Southern boy had come North to get his education. While in Fairdale he was visited by his sister, Nellie, who had all the wondrous beauty of the Southern type.

When Nell Prentiss went home to Virginia she carried with her the heart of the young captain of the Blues. Jack had been about ready to pay Will Prentiss a visit when the war broke out.

Only those who lived amid those exciting scenes can know what a wrenching of hearts, what a breaking of ties followed. Families were divided, brothers turned against each other, fathers went into battle against their sons.

So, when Jack learned of this heroic bit of work on the part of the girl he loved, he was thrilled.

But he knew how fatal it would be to let the lieutenant of Stuart's raiders even guess his sentiments.

So he said quietly:

"I have heard of her. She is a very brave young woman."

"One of the bravest and most beautiful in the South," and the lieutenant's eyes glittered for a moment. "Despite that I should not have yielded to her had it not been for the order she bore from President Davis."

"I shall have to explain all this to Colonel Stuart. May I see the order?"

"Certainly!"

The lieutenant drew from his breast pocket a paper and laid it on the camp table. Jack bent over and read it:

"Nashville, Tennessee, September, 1861.

"TO COLONEL JAMES STUART, TROOP A:

"I am informed that you have in your charge a young woman, the daughter of Willard Champneys. You are, upon receipt of this order, to deliver her up at once to the bearer, Miss Nellie Prentiss. This is imperative.

(Signed) "JEFFERSON DAVIS,
"President."

Jack was completely satisfied. He bowed and said:

"Lieutenant Cross, I cannot see that you have acted otherwise than in keeping with your duty. I will report the same to Colonel Stuart."

"One thing more!"

"Well?"

"Tell Stuart that if he does not return to his command soon, General Foster will, I fear, remove him and substitute some officer who can give more attention to his company."

Jack and Hal saluted and left the tent. In a few moments they were beyond the guard and galloping out of Brierly.

Once outside the town they could not help giving ex-

pression to their delight at the success of their undertaking.

"We didn't get the girl," cried Hal, "but we discovered that she is safe."

"That is true."

"Of course, Miss Prentiss will at once see that she is returned safely to her father."

"She certainly will."

"I cannot see that we can have further interest in the case."

"No!"

"The problem before us is how to get out of this scrape we are in at present. Are we to continue our raid, or are we to try only to get back through the lines?"

"Both," said Jack. "We certainly cannot do any more raiding until Foster makes a change of base."

"Do you think he is likely to do so?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"From what I know of the man, I shall say not at once. Beauregard deems it important to hold these roads. Not unless McClellan sends an invading army will he be liable to move."

"In that case it looks as if we were hemmed in for a long time."

Jack was bound to admit that the outlook was not promising. But the two young officers rode on.

The day was nearing its close. They rode by the last picket guard and were now arrived at the spot where they had met Foster and his staff.

It was not far now to the swamp. In a short while they diverged from the highway. No sign of a Confederate was to be seen anywhere as they plunged into the swamp.

But they had not gone fifty yards into the jungle when they heard the tramp of hoofs and voices mingled with the rattle of accoutrements.

Pulling their horses up the boys peered out through the leafy foliage.

They were startled at the sight which met their gaze.

A large body of Confederate horsemen was deploying along the line of the swamp. The clear sharp orders of the officers could be plainly heard.

"Gee whizz!" whispered Hal, "they must have been close behind us. Do you suppose they spotted us?"

"I don't believe it!"

"What is their game?"

"It looks as if they were trying to surround the swamp."

"Do you suppose they are onto us, and mean to try and drive us out? What is that?"

Both boys gave a start. They looked at each other in an astounded way. For in the distance there rose upon the air the boom of a gun and the bursting of a shell over the swamp.

To both it was comprehensive.

"My soul!" exclaimed Hal. "It's all up, Jack. They are onto our hiding place and they are going to shell us out."

There was no doubt of this. As the appalling fact became plain to the boys they turned their horses and spurred into the swamp.

They knew that it was important to reach Turtle Island at once.

Without their captain the Boys in Blue would not know what move to make. Jack feared that his little command would be wiped out.

In fact he could not but believe that the worst had happened. That their brilliant raid must end in disaster and perhaps death to all.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE SWAMP.

On rode the two young officers. It seemed as if they would never reach Turtle Island.

They saw in the approaching glow the fierce white light of the bursting shells. They could hear the crash of falling trees and smell the smoke of burning underbrush.

Through the intricate maze of the swamp they pressed. At last, with a gasp of relief, Jack's horse floundered through a quagmire and climbed the shore of the island.

The scene was a thrilling one.

It seemed that in some mysterious way the Confederates had succeeded in getting the range of the camp of the Blues.

The shells were bursting all about and upon the island.

They created terrific havoc.

Trees were shattered and dismantled, tons of swamp debris were hurled in air, the gravelly soil of the island was being heaped in mounds.

The scenes in the Blues' camp was, however, not a disorderly one. The boys had accepted the situation coolly and under the orders of Lieutenant Gray they had packed up their camp equipage and were in marching order.

At sight of their young captain they burst into wild cheers.

"I am glad you have come, Jack," cried Will Gray, "the responsibility was more than I could bear. I was just about ready to give up the ghost."

Jack's eyes flashed. His quick gaze took in every detail. A shell burst fifty yards away and hurled sand over them.

"Whew!" cried Hal, "we've got to do something, Jack. We have no bomb-proofs. We must change our quarters for all that I can see."

"All right," agreed Jack. "Where is the little negro boy, Pete?"

"I'se heah, Massa!" cried the little fellow, as he dodged under Jack's arm. "I'se done tole yo' how to git out of dis yere!"

"Then you're the boy we want," cried Jack. "Is everything in marching order, Lieutenant Gray?"

"It is, sir!"

"Very good! We will prepare to evacuate Turtle Island at once."

The Blues fell in with perfect order. Jack and Pete rode at their head. Their course was now to the northwest.

Certainly the little negro boy knew the ways of Misery Swamp. With infallible skill he led them through its intricacies until finally they were beyond the range of the shells.

It was a matter of joy to all, and the spirits of the Blues arose.

Darkness most intense was shutting down about them. But they pushed on, trusting to the skill of Pete.

About midnight a halt was called. They had reached some high ground in the swamp and here camp was made.

It is needless to say that all were tired and welcomed the rest.

The Blues slept on their arms that night. Guards were posted, but a startling thing happened near morning.

A wild yell of alarm, a gurgling death cry and a pistol shot went through the camp and brought every man to his feet.

Jack sprung up and ran into Hal. Everything was alarm and confusion.

But the clear tones of command of the young captain brought the boys into line. Then an investigation revealed a startling fact.

The Confederate raider, Stuart, had been entrusted to the care of two guards. One of these had fallen asleep. The other was taken off his guard by the villain who had in some manner contrived to release his wrists.

He had dealt him a terrible blow on the head, and grasping his musket, had bayoneted the second guard.

Then he dodged into the gloom. In some way he got past the picket and disappeared in the swamp. He then made his way back to the Confederate lines and joined his company.

There was tremendous excitement in the camp of the Blues. Of course, pursuit was at once organized.

It was maintained until long after daybreak, but it yielded no results.

Stuart had made his escape.

It was a matter of deep chagrin to Jack and Hal.

However, it could not be helped. All that could be done was to bury the unfortunate youth whom Stuart had bayoneted.

With daybreak the Blues pushed on. Mile after mile they clambered through the purlieus of that awful swamp.

Some of the boys had already contracted the ague. Jack was anxious, if possible, to get out of the place at once.

"Golly, Massa!" exclaimed Pete. "Dis ain' nuffin' to de Dismal Swamp. If yo' was to git lost in dat, yo' would never git out."

"All right, Pete," said Jack, lightly. "Get us out of this one and we'll agree never to risk the Dismal Swamp."

"I'se done gwine to do it, sah!"

"Where shall we come out?"

"Up yere at de headwaters of Broad Run, sah. Yo' kin den cut across de country an' mebbe dere not be so many Confederate sogers. Praps yo' kin git across de country, sah!"

"Good for you, Pete! I shall surely present you to President Lincoln!"

"Huh! Yo' gwine to gib me to de President, sah? Ain' I gwine to be free?"

Jack laughed at this.

"I mean that I shall introduce you to the President," he said.

"Oh, I see wha' yo' means. But wha' should he keer about a little no 'count niggah like me?"

"Well, he does, as you shall see. He is the friend of your people, my boy."

"He am a good man!"

"Yes, he is a good man. He can be held in no way responsible for the war."

All that forenoon the Fairdale Blues continued to climb through the swamp. It was a hard experience.

Here and there a horse got mired and it took tremendous exertion to pull him out of the mud. Occasionally one of the Blues would sink to his armpits in a treacherous quag and have to be pulled out.

But still all went well, and finally, as the sun reached the midday mark, they came out of the swamp.

They were now nearly twenty miles from General Foster's headquarters and the Champneys plantation.

The booming of the guns could be faintly heard still shelling the swamp. It caused a good laugh.

"A good waste of ammunition," cried Hal. "They will find out before they get through that the Blues are a slippery crowd."

"That they will," agreed Jack, "but we don't realize how much we owe to our friend, Pete, here."

"Yo' gibbs dis chile too much credit, sah," said Pete, modestly.

"Not half what you deserve, my boy. But for you we would now be floundering about in the swamp, not knowing where we were and, perhaps, victims to the shells of the enemy. As it is we have in a few hours slipped entirely out of their clutches and the fact will teach them respect for the Blues and their tactics."

Big Tom Peters caught Pete up on his shoulders and Joe Ward ran to support him.

Teddy Scott, the drummer boy, caught the spirit of the occasion and pulling his drum strap over his shoulders, marched in front playing the "Rail Fence March." The boys all cheered and fell into line singing "John Brown's Body."

It was quite an ovation for the little black boy and he was so deeply affected that tears of joy flowed down his cheeks.

So the march was taken up across the country in the endeavor now to get back through the lines to their own camp at Shady Glen.

None of the little company knew at that time what had been the meaning of the order from General McClellan to go forth upon that raid.

They did not guess that it had been really to mask another movement by a large force on Beauregard's right flank. The move was never made, owing to some misun-

derstanding of orders, so that the expedition of the Blues and their long absence was regarded in Washington as a careless sacrifice of a brave little company of youths.

For it was accepted as impossible for them to return.

There was much recrimination in the War Department at Washington over this affair, as Jack afterward learned.

The reinforcements mentioned by McClellan, of course, did not materialize. The presence of the company of Blues in their lines was known at Beauregard's headquarters and every possible effort was being made to capture them.

Foster had located them in Misery Swamp.

The Confederate general proposed to shell them out. He deployed his men about three sides of the swamp. He had been informed that no living man could make his way out of the swamp to the north.

So he believed that he had the Blues trapped and at his mercy.

This would certainly have been the truth had not the Blues had the invaluable services of little black Pete.

So, while Foster, still believing that the Blues were in the swamp, was trying to drive them out, they were twenty miles away and riding for the Potomac as fast as they could.

But the Blues were by no means as yet assured of getting safely through the lines.

Dangers innumerable were upon every side of them.

At any moment they were apt to be surrounded by the foe, and that would certainly mean capture.

There was a sentiment among the boys which was most powerful. This had found expression in an exclamation of Tom Peters:

"On this trip, boys, we are to win. We will die, but never surrender!"

"No surrender!" became their cry.

Jack proceeded with extreme caution. Had they been traveling through a friendly country their chances would have been better.

But, with the chance of being reported by any planter whose home they passed, there was little chance of evading detection.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE COAL MINE.

So Jack proceeded with the most extreme caution. He sent scouts far ahead to keep a lookout for the foe.

But Confederate scouts and spies were everywhere. Had the day been longer the Blues assuredly would never have escaped capture.

They rode madly past plantations where desolation seemed to reign. But behind the barricaded doors were the owners with shotguns and dogs, prepared to defend their property against the raiders of either army.

Jack was praying for darkness.

The sun was already well down in the western sky. As yet the Blues had played in great luck.

Little Pete, who seemed to have been born to the trade, proved a clever guide. The boy knew every lane and by-way. Every swamp and woods and every fordway.

This was of mighty aid to the Blues.

On they rode, until suddenly, as they approached an eminence, they were brought to a sudden halt.

A scout came riding back in great excitement.

"The Confederates are in force on the other side of that hill," he said.

Jack was instantly alert.

"Keep the boys in cheer, Hal!" he commanded. "Draw them into the cover of those oaks! I will be back soon."

Jack galloped swiftly to the hilltop. He dismounted and creeping to the summit of the ridge peered over it.

Far down in the valley below he saw an advancing gray line. It was thin but extended north and south as far as he could see, which was more than a mile.

He wondered at this action of the Confederate columns. It was as if they were advancing to an attack.

But this could not be. He guessed rightly, that it was a move intended to act as a dragnet across the country, and he and his company of Blues were to be the fish.

This was the worst contingency the Blues had yet faced.

To stand their grounds would be certainly suicidal. The lines would converge and overwhelm them.

To try and charge through the line would be worse yet. To retreat to the swamp would mean a long siege and starvation.

Jack was in a dilemma. An ordinary spirit might have been impelled to yield. But not so the boy captain of the Blues.

There was a way out of the scrape he felt sure. He could not bear to think of giving up to capture now, after the plucky fight they had made.

But something must be done, and at once. The gray line was not over a mile away.

It was on foot, however, and moving slowly. Jack remounted his horse and rode back. In a few words he explained the situation to Hal.

"We are trapped!" said the young lieutenant, "there is no chance for us, I fear."

"We must and will pull out," said Jack, resolutely. "Where is Pete?"

The little colored boy had been waiting nearby. The news of the Confederate advance had traveled like wildfire through the company.

"Me heah, Massa!" he cried, as he sprung forward. "Wha' yo' want wif me?"

"Pete," said Jack, "you know the position we are in. Do you know of any way to hide until the foe passes by?"

The little negro's eyes danced.

"Yo' kin bet I do!" he cried. "I was jes' waitin' fo' yo' to ax me! Does yo' see dat high ridge way ober dere? Well dat am ole Massa Holden's coal mine. He was an ole man 'bout ninety years old an' he died jes' a lily while ago. He tought dere was a big payin' streak ob coal on his

farm an' he jes' dug a deep hole in de ground. Dere am all kin's ob passages all froo dat ridge ob lan' an' de mouf ob it hab been closed up fo' a long time. I don' beliebe nobody round dese yere pahts knows jes' whar it is 'cept me. I kin take yo' right in dar an' yo' kin hide all safe an' sound till de Confederates goes by."

This most astonishing bit of information it is hardly necessary to say caused a sensation.

Jack and the Blues were elated. Hope once more sprung up in their hearts.

"Pete!" cried the boy captain, "you are certainly a wonder. Take us to that coal mine just as quick as you can."

Every man sprung into the saddle. The Blues galloped away down the lane which led to the Holden plantation.

This was a dismantled old homestead that had been abandoned for years.

It had been sadly neglected by its aged and erratic owner. The buildings had fallen to decay; the land had run out so that it would no longer support any sort of a crop.

Holden had been dead many years.

The coal mine which forty years before had been his hobby, was almost forgotten by the present generation.

As Pete said, few beside himself even knew of its existence. The entrance had long been covered up.

The Blues raced down the long lane and across the farm yard. They leaped the bars of the rotting fence and dashed into a growth of scrub oaks.

Here Pete called a halt.

The little negro boy led the way to a large shed-like building which seemed to be built into the side of the hill. He opened a door in the rear partition.

A draft of damp air greeted Jack and Hal. They saw a large cavernous opening.

Striking a match, the young captain stepped into the mouth of the mine. He saw a large high arched passage.

Great lumps of black rock were scattered about on the rock floor. The place was large enough to easily hold the whole troop.

So, quickly, one by one they led their horses into the dark cavern. No light was used for fear that detection might follow.

When the Blues were all in the coal mine, Jack and Hal, with Pete, climbed the ridge and watched the advance of the foe.

The long gray column had already overlapped the distant height and was coming down rapidly. In their advance went a cloud of scouts.

As long as they dared they watched the advance. Then Pete exclaimed:

"I done fink we bettah go back, sah! Ise afeard dey see us yere!"

"You're right, Pete!" cried Jack. "So back we will go. Come on Hal!"

And back they did go. In a few moments they were in the mine entrance and had closed the heavy wooden door.

Through the cracks they could peer out and see the whole of the farm yard. It was not long before they saw a soldier in gray leap the fence.

He struck his musket butt against the door of the old house and it crashed in.

"Here we are, comrades!" he cried. "Let's have a bon-fire!"

Several other Confederate soldiers appeared and began to pile up rubbish against the building.

But into the yard rode an officer who gave sharp stern orders and the would-be house-burners went on.

The officer was joined by another. They were within easy earshot and Jack plainly heard their remarks.

"Well, Beals, we've scoured this part of the country well. If the infernal Yankee raiders are around here they must be weasels and burrow in the ground."

"That's right, Colonel Fraser! We can't find hide nor hair of them."

"It's my opinion they are still in that swamp!"

"Stuart says not! He was captured by them, and said a negro boy was piloting them out safely when he escaped."

"Stuart is a scoundrel! I don't trust him at all."

"Oh, well, you ought not to say that. He is a raider and half guerrilla, but he is loyal to the Confederacy."

"I don't know about that. A man who tries to abduct women, and steal the daughter of an honest planter and a sympathizer with the Confederacy, can hardly be called loyal to any principles."

"Is that true of Stuart?"

"It is!"

"The deuce! If that is so I shall cut his acquaintance. Does Mr. Davis know of it?"

"I am not sure. If he did I have no doubt Stuart would get his discharge. Mr. Davis does not approve of any lawless deed of violence."

"Who is the young woman whom Stuart has abducted?"

"She is Esther Champneys!"

"What? Not the daughter of Willard Champneys of White Rose Plantation?"

"The same!"

"I am assured now that Stuart is a scoundrel. He shall be reported, as I am a living man. That is infamous."

"I am glad to hear you admit that. The fewer we have

of those sort of men in the Confederacy, the better off we will be."

"That is true!"

"Where is Stuart now?"

"From the report I received this morning he left Brierly this morning with his men. He sent word to General Foster of the whereabouts of the Blues and of his escape at an early hour, then he started to join his command."

The officers now turned their horses and prepared to ride away. All this had been of interest to Jack and Hal.

In a few minutes they were gone. But it was an hour before the Blues dared venture from their hiding place.

By that time no sign of the Confederate line was to be seen.

"All right, boys!" cried Jack. "All forth and into saddle. I believe we have escaped owing to the sagacity of our young friend Pete."

"Hurrah for Pete!" cried the boys.

In another moment they were in the saddle and riding away again. Darkness was now close at hand.

Over the ridge rode the little band of Blues. Jack had begun to feel that success was to wait upon them.

If there was now no more serious obstacle to overcome they might get to Shady Glen in safety.

With the cover of darkness to aid them they were hopeful.

Pete knew all the roads and seemed to instinctively know which was the best to take to escape the foe.

On they went; cautiously, to be sure, until suddenly the light of campfires shone out in the gloom ahead.

So unexpected was this new turn in affairs that Jack was for a moment dismayed. He at once called a halt.

The spot was at the summit of a little ridge. From this height a wide view of the country might have been afforded in daylight.

But now, of course, all was gloom save for the campfires which glowed like fiery eyes in the wall of darkness.

"What have we here?" cried Hal in surprise. "Is it another division of Beauregard's army?"

Little Pete seemed perplexed. He dismounted and went forward to examine the road. The little fellow presently returned and said:

"Dey mus' be de Yankees, sah! I don' believe dat any ob Beauregard's men am down dis way."

A sudden thrill seized Jack. What if this was true? What if McClellan's promised reinforcements were really before him?

Jack felt that this must be true and in that case the end of the raid and safety was at hand.

But he was doomed to disappointment.

CHAPTER XI.

RESCUED AT LAST.

The Blues were halted on the ridge. The presumption that the campfires might be those of McClellan's reinforcements filled all with hope and cheer.

Jack, however, was not so foolhardy as to go forward on that assumption.

He must first ascertain if the campfires before them were of friends or foes. In order to do this he must proceed with caution.

He quickly made up his mind how to discover this fact. Nearby was a small grove of trees.

Jack led his little troop into this and in the shadows bade them to keep silent and wait for his return.

"You are not going alone?" asked Hal.

"No!" replied Jack. "I am going to take Corporal Peters with me."

This delighted Peters, who was instantly on hand. In a few moments the young captain and his corporal had set out.

Down the ridge they quietly crept.

At the bottom of the gully they knew that they must meet with the picket. So they went on cautiously.

Suddenly, however, Peters placed a hand on Jack's arm and whispered:

"Sh! Wait a moment, Captain! Do you hear that?"

Jack's quick ear had caught the same sound which had attracted Peters' attention. It was the sound of voices.

They seemed muffled, and the words could not be distinguished. The two young soldiers waited and listened.

It seemed odd that the voices did not seem to grow more distinct nor to increase in volume. They seemed not so very far distant.

"What do you make of it, Jack?" asked Peters.

"Let us go along the side of the ridge a little ways. Perhaps we may learn."

So they crept along a few yards. Suddenly a star of light flashed through a thicket near them.

And, even as they saw the light they heard that which gave them a great start. It was the muffled scream of a woman.

In a moment Jack was on his feet.

"Something is wrong," he cried. "We must find it out."

Forward the two young soldiers sprang.

In a few moments they had pushed through the bushes and come upon a small hut on the hillside.

Before it were a couple of horses. The door was closed, but a light gleamed through the window.

It was such a habitation as the negro was able to own. Jack, however, was not disposed to do anything rash.

He had no desire to walk into a trap.

He first crept up to the window, at the same time making sure that nobody was looking outside the cabin.

In another moment he peered through the pane. He gave a wild start and his whole being tingled.

What he saw was thrilling.

The cabin held five occupants. Three were women and two were men.

One was a black woman who stood with her broad back to the door, her arms akimbo. By the hearth, on which blazed a fire, stood a young girl, pale and beautiful as a dream. Her manner was that of anger and scorn.

Beside her stood another young woman not a whit less beautiful, but cool and courageous. In her hand she held a pistol.

Jack recognized them both. The first he knew to be Esther Champneys from a description given him.

The other was a girl who to him was above all others in the whole world—the girl he adored and revered.

Nellie Prentiss, the brave Southern girl spy, stood facing two men who stood near the colored woman.

They were dressed in Confederate uniforms. One was a sergeant of cavalry. The other wore a colonel's shoulder-straps.

He was Stuart, the raider.

"You are an atrocious monster!" Nell Prentiss was saying in denunciatory tones. "You have persecuted this young woman just as long as you ever will. I will shoot you just as I would a poisonous snake if you do not stand aside and let us pass."

"See here, my young woman," said Stuart, angrily, "this is no affair of yours. Stand aside!"

"Advance a step and you die."

"Nell Prentiss, you are a fool!" gritted Stuart. "I love this girl and she must be mine."

"She will never be yours. She has told me that she loathes you."

"She has, eh?" snapped the raider. "I'll force her to change her mind. Come, I am not a man to be trifled with. I give you one more chance. Stand aside!"

He advanced, but paused as Nell brought the pistol to a level with his breast.

"You have made an outlaw of yourself, Jim Stuart," she said. "You have ignored the order of President Davis and he will see that you are punished."

Stuart's crafty gaze was fixed upon the brave girl spy. He watched her intently. His companion made a spring to one side.

The movement for one brief instant distracted her attention.

But that instant was enough.

Stuart gave one leap forward and had caught her wrist. The pistol exploded but the ball went through the roof.

Jack waited for no more.

With a lunge against the door he sent it flying open. Into the cabin he sprang, followed by Tom Peters.

Stuart released his hold upon Nell Prentiss and sprang back. He faced Jack with a wild glare of surprise and hatred in his eyes.

"You!" he gritted. "The deuce! What has brought you here?"

"Providence!" cried Jack. "I thank Heaven for it! I am in time!"

"Jack Clark!" cried Nell Prentiss, with a wild light of joy in her lovely eyes. "Oh, I am so glad you have come!"

But Jack had his wary eye upon Stuart, and could only say:

"I thank you, Nellie! It is the happiest hour of my life."

"Oh, I see!" sneered Stuart, as he stood sword in hand and watching his foe like a cat. "You have a love affair as well as I."

"But I do not play the part of a brute as you do," said Jack, coldly. "Jim Stuart, you are a prisoner!"

"Am I?" said Stuart, sneeringly. "Don't you believe it. With a signal, a hundred of my men will be here in an instant."

Jack did not believe this. It was a falsehood and a bluff as he well knew.

So he said coldly again:

"Surrender, or I shall run you through!"

"Run me through?" sneered the villain. "You run me through? What do you know about the sword? Why I would cut you in strings."

"Try me first!" cried Corporal Peters, as he brought his sabre around at guard. Stuart made a lightning pass at him, but Jack struck the blade up.

In an instant the swords crossed. Hatred and scorn was in Stuart's face. But Jack was calm and critical.

He had no doubt that the Confederate was a good swordsman. He could see this by the way he handled the weapon.

But Jack had trained abroad with the blade and had little fear but that he could take care of himself.

However, he was not disposed to take chances. So for a moment he met Stuart's attack cautiously. But in that moment he solved the other's style.

So, when the villain attacked again fiercely, Jack relaxed his defensive work and took up the offensive.

The blades flashed and clanged, and the scene was a fierce one. Esther Champneys, pallid and trembling, looked on in awed silence.

But Nell Prentiss, alert and eager, and confident as to the winner, watched the play. The end soon came.

The sword was struck from Stuart's hand by a clever manipulation which turned his wrist. With a yell of pain the villain cried:

"You can't strike down an unarmed man. I surrender!"

Jack held the point of his blade at his breast and said, sternly:

"I don't trust you! Peters, bind his hands behind him. Then bind the other fellow."

The companion of Stuart surrendered without a word. The game was over. Once again Jack Clark was a victor.

Peters quickly bound the two men. All the while Stuart kept declaring:

"You can't hang me! I am a prisoner of war."

"Yes!" said Jack, coolly, "you are a prisoner of war, and I shall not hang you. You may wish I had before you get through."

Nell Prentiss had thrown her arms about Esther, who was weak and faint. The old colored woman had fled the hut.

"All right, Nellie! I suppose this gentleman is one of your compatriots. But I am compelled to hold him a prisoner."

"I am glad that he is likely to get his just deserts," said Nell. "I wish you would hang him now."

"No, I will not do that. But tell me, how did you come here?"

"Ah! it is a long story," said the young girl spy. "After I secured Esther from Cross, at Brierly, on President Davis' order, for which I wrote, I started for Brentsville. From there I meant to send her to her father's plantation.

"But our horses gave out an hour ago and we found this hut and accepted it for shelter for the night. The colored woman, who was with us, begged the privilege of going with us, and as she seemed faithful, I took her along. You know the rest."

"It is like you, Nell, to brave death to accomplish a mission like this."

"This is a trying hour for our country, Jack. I feel that we women of the South must do all that we can for the wronged and the oppressed, for the suffering and the afflicted."

"It is sad, indeed, that the people of this great country should meet on a battlefield."

"The South has sought only her rights."

"I know that the North does not wish to deprive her of her rights."

Nell looked at Jack a moment. Each was conscious of the other's love. But there was that sinister bar between them.

"I am sorry, Nell!"

"It cannot be helped," she said, in a low tone. "But—I am a Southern spy. I yield myself as your prisoner."

Jack longed at that moment to accept that admission in a more literal sense and demand that the surrender be for life.

But he could not summon the courage to do so. He groaned and turned away.

"Peters," he said. "Go back and bring down a guard to take charge of the prisoners. I do not know that we shall ever be able to hold them."

Peters disappeared at once. Now Esther Champneys stepped forward and said:

"Sir, I wish to thank you for coming to my rescue in so chivalrous a manner. My father will be very grateful and will see that you are repaid."

"I am pleased to have done you this service," said Jack, gallantly. "I seek only to take the prisoners to Washington safely. I promised your father that if harm had been done you, I would turn Stuart over to his vengeance. But I am pleased to keep him as a prisoner of war."

"Subject to exchange!" whined Stuart.

"As you will!" said Jack.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE END.

When Peters returned with the guard the prisoners were taken in charge. Nell Prentiss stepped forward to go with them, but Jack put a hand on her arm.

"You pain me!" he said. "I could never offer you such an indignity. I could not take you prisoner—in such a way."

"Your duty——"

"My duty is—gallantry and respect to ladies." Jack bowed to both young women. "I hope to live up to that."

A light of pleasure and appreciation flashed into the eyes of Nell Prentiss. She understood well the sentiment.

"I accept the favor at the hands of the most chivalrous young Union officer I have ever known," she said.

"Those are my sentiments," said Esther.

But while Jack's veins were tingling, and while he was trying to frame further speech, Hal Martin bounded into the cabin.

"There's something going on down there in the Confederate camp," he said. "I think we had better move on."

In a moment Jack sprung out of the hut. He saw that lights were flashing in the darkness below and that the notes of the bugle were sounding.

It indicated that the Confederate forces were moving. For some moments the young captain watched them.

"What shall we do, Captain?" asked the young lieutenant.

"Stay right here," said Jack. "We are as safe here as anywhere!"

"But if they come this way——"

"They are not, as you can see. They are moving off down the valley. I believe that is in our favor."

"You have recaptured Stuart."

"Yes!"

"Do you suppose his men are about here?"

"If they are we shall not fear them. It is more than likely that they are with that force below?"

For hours the Blues rested on the ridge and watched the forces of the Confederates depart. In a short while nothing but the glowing ashes of their campfires were left.

Not until morning did the Blues dare to move from their position.

In the meanwhile the sergeant who had been recaptured with Stuart, confessed that Beauregard had sent an order for the raider's arrest, and that he had fled into the country and by chance had come upon the two women in the hut.

Chance had also been kind to the Blues.

With the night movement of that part of Beauregard's line, a gap was left through which the Fairdale Blues were able to make their escape.

They marched boldly past Brentsville and before another day they were within easy distance of Shady Glen.

When near Brentsville, Nell Prentiss mounted her horse and rode away. Jack Clark bade her a kindly farewell.

Just as she seated herself in the saddle, he whispered:

"If it were not for the war, Nell?"

"When the war is over," she said, with a spirited laugh. The young Yankee captain watched her out of sight.

Then he turned with a sigh. Little Pete, the negro boy, cap in hand, stood near.

"Does yo' hab any funder use fo' dis chile, Massa?" he asked.

"Do you want to leave me, Pete?" Jack asked.

"I jes' reckon I go wif Missy Esther back to White Rose and Massa Champneys," he said, "ef yo' has no funder use fo' dis chile."

"I was going to take you to Washington to see President Lincoln."

The boy's eyes danced. But he said:

"Kaint leave Missy Esther fo' dat, sah!"

It happened that Esther, who stood near, overheard these remarks. She now stepped forward with a smile.

"It's all right, Pete. I will go back to Alexandria to my Aunt Clarinda. You can go to Washington with Captain Clark and when you return you can come back to me. I will send word to my father at White Rose to come to Alexandria also."

Little Pete turned a handspring.

"I'se jes' de happiest fellah in de whole world," he cried.

A few hours later the Blues marched safely into their camp at Shady Glen. The great raid was over.

It had been a mighty success.

A mere handful of Yankee boys had gone clear through the Confederate lines. They had raided plantations, captured a battery of guns, inflicted much damage upon the Confederates and had extricated themselves though hunted by the whole of Beauregard's army. They had gone away on foot and returned in the saddle.

Two days later Jack went to Washington to report. He took Pete with him, and true to his promise, presented him to the President.

Pete came back with a fine suit of clothes and one hundred gold dollars in his pocket. He went to Alexandria the happiest little fellow in the South. In the interval Stuart was court-martialed and shot.

General McClellan was astonished and delighted at the safe return of the Blues. The little company received honorable mention and the President sent them many words of praise.

"We are waiting for orders," said Jack Clark, as he left Washington again for the front.

"You shall have them very soon," said General McClellan. "There will be plenty of work for you to do."

And so ended the great raid of the Fairdale Blues, when they went through the line and returned to tell the tale.

THE END.

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